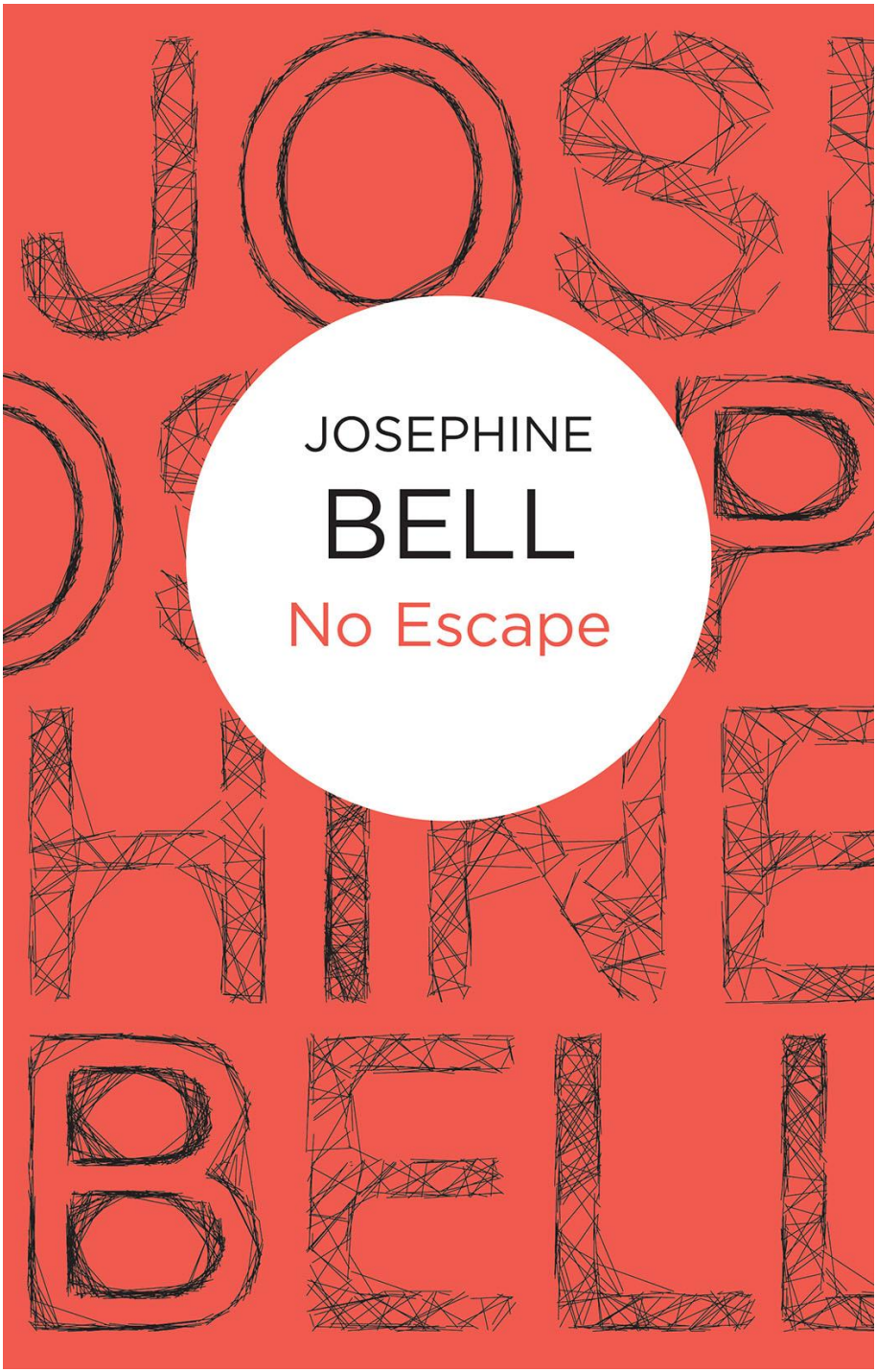
JOSEPHINE
BELL
No Escape

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Josephine Bell

No Escape

Josephine Bell

Josephine Bell was born Doris Bell Collier in Manchester, England. Between 1910 and 1916 she studied at Godolphin School, then trained at Newnham College, Cambridge until 1919. At the University College Hospital in London she was granted M.R.C.S. and L.R.C.P. in 1922, and a M.B.B. S. in 1924.

Bell was a prolific author, writing forty-three novels and numerous uncollected short stories during a forty-five year period.

Many of her short stories appeared in the *London Evening Standard*. Using her pen name she wrote numerous detective novels beginning in 1936, and she was well-known for her medical mysteries. Her early books featured the fictional character Dr. David Wintringham who worked at Research Hospital in London as a junior assistant physician. She helped found the Crime Writers' Association in 1953 and served as chair during 1959–60.

Chapter One

Timothy Long ran down the steps of the West Kensington Hospital entrance, crossed the front sweep, passed the gates and turned left, heading for the river.

It was the first break he had had that day, which had begun at five in the morning with the arrival of an acute appendix case. A very acute appendix, he found, when he reached the blackened, stinking thing, cooked by its owner for three days of agony before the doctor was called. These incredibly courageous fools Tim thought. Or was it fear, not courage? Fear of the doctor's verdict, which might be death. Fear of unknown horrors, worse than present pain. Well, the G.P. had wasted no time and the idiot would live—which he scarcely deserved.

Timothy swung left again, which brought him to Hammersmith Broadway and its tricky crossings. The London evening air, though petrol-laden and heavy with the remains of last night's fog, began to lift his spirits and drive out the more soporific fumes of the operating theatre. He had certainly had his fill of that hot house atmosphere today. After the early emergency, a full list of his own confronted him. This had taken from nine o' clock until after one. Another look at the appendix chap, conscious now, supremely sorry for himself, almost persuaded that the surgeons had killed him, as he knew all along they would.

A late lunch, an afternoon in the Out-Patient Department, followed by a slow visit to the wards with his boss. Old Beech-Thomas at his most pontifical, his most exacting. No let-up at all until the old boy had stared at the clock in Nuffield Ward, compared it with his own watch, eyebrows raised incredulously and said, "I'm supposed to be meeting my wife in half an hour."

"Yes, sir," Tim had said, hopefully. "Shall I get her on the phone for you?"

"Certainly not, boy, certainly not!" The suggestion was having the desired effect. Beech-Thomas was pounding towards the ward door. "I have to leave you, Sister. Mr Long will finish for me. Nothing else of urgent importance, is there? Don't follow

me. Good-day to you. Thank you."

He was gone without waiting for an answer, the double swing doors of the ward clapping behind him. Sister had been left far behind, only Nurse Copper waited at Tim's elbow, face entirely composed, eyes gleaming with secret laughter.

Tim passed through the ward doors himself, the nurse following. He paused, leaning dramatically against the wail of the corridor.

"The old slave-driver!" he said, weakly. "He knows my day began at five. Thirteen and a half hours already, with twenty minutes for a so-called lunch and he expects me to finish his round for him. What would Sister say if I fainted on the ward floor? What would you do if I collapsed here and now?"

"Go and find Sister," Nurse Cooper said, her face including her eyes, now altogether cold.

Sister in Nuffield Ward came quickly, assuring Tim she had no more problems at present. He met a junior houseman further along the main corridor who wanted advice about a patient due to leave the next day. After that there were notes to write up, a couple of telephone calls to attend to and dinner in the Resident Staff dining-room. Tim's job as surgical registrar involved spending two nights a week in residence. This was the second of them.

Now, at nine o'clock, in what appeared to be a complete lull, he was making his dash for the river and fresh air. Hammersmith Bridge, lights gleaming, was ahead at the end of the approach road. He was taking a chance on no one wanting him for the next half-hour. With luck no one would want him until tomorrow morning, though he intended to take another look at the appendix case before he turned in. Emergency operations two nights running would be perfectly possible, but it didn't happen every week. It ought not to happen at all. But the Ministry of Health, having built a new annexe to the hospital to fill the urgent needs of an increased local population, had not yet appointed an extra consultant surgeon to do the extra work. They were going to do so, at the end of the year, but they were proposing at the same time, to cut out the junior registrar's job altogether. So things would be much the same for him. The usual sweated labour. Why, after fifteen years' training, did anyone work an average sixteen hours a day for a salary that

wouldn't tempt a beginner in the business world? Crazy, of course, but there was nothing else he wanted to do. And the politicians were not ashamed to soak him for it.

As he reached the bridge and slowed down, moving to the parapet to look over, Tim felt some of his protesting bitterness slide from him. It had other reasons behind it not at all connected with his professional standing, his work or its reward. Nurse Cooper's attitude rankled. He was making no progress there at all. It annoyed and disturbed him. Earlier encounters with nurses and girl students and other girls outside medicine had not been entirely disappointing. He did not always expect to win; he was still not anxious to be married. But he liked to have a companion, even if nothing came of it, even if they quarrelled early and broke it up. Nurse Cooper, he did not even know her first name, looked exciting, had a wonderful voice, was extremely efficient and kept making it abundantly clear that she took no interest in him whatever.

He swore to himself, staring at the lights on the water and the dark shapes of a tug with barges moving rapidly down-stream on the ebb. He noticed that the mud was already beginning to show under the wall. Some of the cluster of house-boats moored near the bridge were heeling over slightly as they settled. A dreary lot of craft, he thought. Who would go to live there in the cold and damp and noise, cut off from the shore at regular intervals by the tide? He shivered, his gloomy thoughts dwelling again, on Nurse Cooper, his memory presenting him with yet more evidence of her total disregard.

And not only Cooper. There had been that girl in the radiography department that afternoon. Beech-Thomas had asked for the report on a case. The films were there, a series in a large envelope, but no report. At first Beeeh-Thomas had said nothing, simply took the films to the viewing box and stuck them in one after another. Then back to the first, then mixing them up, dropping one or two, which Tim retrieved, finally, turning in exasperation to demand the report, which Tim could not find.

Miss Gleaning, head radiographer, was not helpful. She resented Tim's second intrusion into her department. Her girls were working at full stretch; as she was herself …

"If Dr Milton made a report," she said, "it will be with the

films.”

“But it isn’t.”

“Are your sure?”

Clutching his patience with both hands Tim said he was certain.

“Then I can only suggest the report was taken out in the ward and mislaid,” Miss Gleaning said.

Tim left her, found Dr Milton, the radiologist, in his room and appealed to him direct. Milton was more cooperative. He remembered the case. He looked up his notes. He summoned his secretary and went into the fate of the report. Finally he ordered a duplicate to be sent up to Beech-Thomas as soon as it was typed out.

Tim stayed where he was during the unavoidable short delay, staring at one or two films stuck in the many viewing boxes round Dr Milton’s office walls. He said nothing; the radiologist ignored him.

At last one of the junior radiographers, a dark girl he had noticed once or twice because she looked more alive than the others, came in with a sheet of paper in one hand and a wet film on a carrier in the other.

“Mrs Brown’s gall bladder, sir,” she said to Dr Milton’s back, and in a side whisper to Tim. “The report for Dr Beech-Thomas, but Sister phoned down—”

Dr Milton had risen to take the just developed film. He barely glanced at Tim.

“Better get back with that, hadn’t you?” he said, ungraciously.

“Yes. Thank you, sir,” Tim muttered and went quickly, colliding with the girl who stood back to let the registrar out first at the same moment that Tim, with automatic politeness, stood back to let her go before him.

“Sorry,” he said with marked anger, as they both got out of the room.

“That’s all right,” she answered. “I was trying to tell you Sister phoned down to say she’d found the report in another envelope.”

“Damnation!” he exploded, clutching the duplicate so roughly it began to crumple in his hand. “Sorry,” he said again automatically polite.

He looked at the girl. Her face was half-turned away. She was

laughing her head off, he decided.

On his way back to the ward he remembered her name. Jane Wheelan. What business was it of hers, anyway, that she should laugh at him? These women! Frigid robots like the Cooper wench or prying jokers like Jane Wheelan. He was sick of women.

Standing on the bridge staring out over the black, neon-streaked water, Tim forced his mind away from these and other memories of his harassed day. He had not come down here to brood, he decided, beginning at last to laugh at himself. He began to turn away from the parapet and as he did so he heard a thin cry from the water behind and below him.

He turned back. A seagull? Above the noise of the traffic on the bridge the sound had been faint; but quite distinct. There were no seagulls, or at least he saw none. So what—?

He peered over the parapet but saw nothing, until suddenly a bundle swept into view and a thin white arm shot up from it, a round white face lifted despairingly, dipped and disappeared under the bridge.

Tim found himself in the water without any conscious appreciation of time passing. He had shot across the traffic, causing two near-accidents and one genuine pile-up; he had torn off his duffle coat, shoes and jacket, tumbled over the parapet and was falling the considerable height to the water before he even considered what he was going to do when he got there. He had just time to wonder if the man in the water was clear of the bridge or if he would actually fall on top of him when he hit the water himself. The impact was fierce. He had gone in feet first and he sank some distance. He was gratified to find that he was clutching his nose as he had always done as a small boy until he was ten and learned to dive. He pushed himself back to the surface, shook his head free of water and looked about him, first back at the bridge, which seemed a long way off already, a dark mass with a row of dots along the top, the heads of an excited crowd; then at the water beneath, a rippling empty flood bearing down on him, carrying him along with it; then ahead, at the backs of the little waves curling over as they ran.

At first he saw nothing, but just as he began to wonder if he had been altogether mistaken, in which case he was all kinds of a foot, he saw once more a thin white arm lift from the water

and fall back. Putting his face down he made off towards it in a fast crawl, passed the floating object, turned on his hack and as it came up to him, grasped the shoulders of a human figure.

It was a girl, he saw, without much surprise. Most of the river suicides they brought to the West Kensington as query corpses were women. This one, from what he could see in the dim light on the water was young. Short and slight too, he decided with relief, for as soon as he grabbed her she had stopped her own attempts to swim and lay still, her legs sinking down on to his.

"Go on kicking," he told her, "helps me and keeps your circulation going."

She did not attempt to answer but began again to use her legs and, as her face was now above water, to cough and spit to clear her mouth and lungs.

Tim swam easily, holding her and turning his head at regular intervals to look for a possible landing place. He dared not try the mud which seemed here to reach right up to the embankment wall with no firmer stretch of shingle at the edge. Besides, there were no steps in the wall, which seemed to indicate that this was not a place where anyone could expect to climb up or down.

He wondered how long they would have to swim like this before rescue came, a police launch or some other boat. He tried to go over in his mind the detail of the Boat Race course, but did not find it helpful. Putney. There were boat-houses at Putney. How far was it from Hammersmith to Putney?

He found the girl was speaking.

"I can't go on," she was saying. She seemed to be repeating it over and over again in the intervals of gasping and spluttering when waves washed over her upturned face. "Let me go. Save yourself. I can't go on."

"Rot!" he shouted at her. "You're doing fine. We'll be making land in a minute. Keep it up! You're doing fine!"

He was beginning to feel cold himself. Not tired, hut miserably, dangerously cold. She must be worse. Her movements were very feeble now. He began to rage inwardly at the bare thought of failure, but he kept his steady pace, though he began to steer, away from the inhospitable left bank towards the centre of the stream. The tide ran faster here and there was less danger of being swept into moored boats and dragged under them by

the current.

And then a beam of light shot over the river from side to side and the sound of powerful engines roused even the girl. She began to struggle.

"Shut up!" Tim yelled at her. "Keep still. It's looking for us. They'll pick us up. Keep still, damn you!"

He went on shouting at her but she fought so hard he nearly lost his hold twice and in the end he had to dip her head under the water and hold her there before she became quiet enough to manage. When the police launch reached them and strong arms took her from him she was limp and still and rolled over on the deck of the launch, unconscious.

Tim was pulled inboard. He stood swaying for a few seconds, feeling colder than ever in the keen wind that blew up the river. He began to shiver violently.

"Come on," one of the patrol said, urging him with a strong arm. "Get below and get those things off. Talk later."

Tim obeyed thankfully. In the warmth and shelter of the cabin below the wheelhouse, supplied with a dry towel, a pair of jeans and a sweater, he soon recovered. He had not been in the water for more than half an hour and was used to swimming for twice that time. The girl had been no trouble until just at the end. The girl—

"Is she all right?" he asked, looking about him.

Two men, whose backs had hidden her up to now, looked round.

"She'll do," one of them said.

"She was fine until your searchlight picked us up," Tim said, moving forward. "Then she panicked. I had to be a bit rough—"

"Why can't they do it quietly at home?" the other man said. "Where nobody like you is on hand to interfere."

"Can I have a look at her?" Tim said. "I'm a doctor, actually."

He was annoyed by the man's indifference, so he asserted his position with unnecessary vigour.

"O.K." the man who had first spoken agreed. "You a friend of hers?"

"Good God, no! Never seen her before," Tim answered, picking up the girl's unresisting arm and feeling her pulses.

She was lying on her back, very still, covered up to the neck in grey blankets. Her eyes were shut, her breathing rapid but

regular, like her pulse.

She was not unconscious, Tim decided, but she was desperately afraid.

"Has she said anything?" he asked.

"When we carried her down she said 'I can't go on—I told him I can't go on.' "

"That's what she told me just before she began to struggle," Tim said, nodding.

"There you are, then."

They meant, clear case of suicide, isn't it? But Tim was not convinced. She had cried out for help. She had signalled with her arm. She had accepted his help at first. She had even been co-operative. It was this particular form of rescue she wanted to avoid. The police were the cause of her immediate fear at least.

He kept this conclusion to himself. A few seconds later a steaming mug of tea was put into his hands and the girl was lifted while another mug was held to her mouth.

She gave a little cry when the hot rim touched her lips and her eyes opened very wide.

"Drink some," said Tim in his best bedside manner. "Doctor's, orders."

She stared, not taking this in, not realising her surroundings at all. But she put a hand to the mug and having sipped one mouthful, sipped again.

"Who are you?" she said at last, pushing the mug from her.

Tim hesitated.

"He's the bloke that's just saved your life, miss," said the officer with the cup, handing it to the other and issuing a string of rapid orders. He turned back to the girl. "I am an officer of the River Police. This is the launch that effected your rescue from the river. Would you like to tell me how you came to be in the water?"

The girl stiffened.

"No!" she cried. "No! No! No!"

Tim moved quickly to her side again.

"Lie down," he ordered. "Do as I tell you. Lie down!"

She obeyed him slowly, covering her face with her hands, beginning to sob.

"I'll tell you what happened," Tim said. "At least everything from Hammersmith Bridge to wherever it was you picked us

up."

"That won't tell us where she fell in—or jumped in—will it? Or will it?"

Tim told his story briefly. There was not much to it, he realised; the patrol officer was right. It threw no light at all on the question they all needed to know. Was this an accident, and attempted suicide, the most probable explanation, or something much more sinister?

"She won't tell you in her present state," Tim said, in a low voice when he had finished. "Send someone up to the hospital tomorrow morning. You might have more luck then. You don't have to sit at the bedside these days, do you?"

"Thanks for the information," the officer said, with heavy sarcasm. "Perhaps you'd like to advise me which hospital she ought to go to?"

"Mine, of course," said Tim, impatiently. "Aren't you making for the nearest pier? Well, the West Kensington is the nearest place for casualties, isn't it? I'm surgical registrar there, on duty tonight—sleeping in. Oh, my God!"

He stopped abruptly.

"Yes, sir?"

"What's the time?" He shook his wrist despairingly. "I've drowned my watch. What time is it, for Christ's sake?"

"Ten forty-five."

"Is that all?"

The river patrol man grinned.

"We should be nearly there now," he said. "Ambulance will be waiting. They'll have fixed a bed for the young lady."

"At the West Kensington?"

"I couldn't say."

The launch rounded up into the tide to come alongside the pier at Chelsea. She heeled as she came broadside on to the wives whipped up by the wind, and the girl, feeling herself slipping, cried out in renewed terror.

"Not to worry!" Tim called to her, staggering in his turn as the vessel righted again. "We're just about to land."

They were alone now, the officer having gone to the wheel to bring the launch alongside himself.

"Listen!" said Tim urgently. "You're to do exactly what I tell you. I'm going to arrange a bed for you at the hospital where I

work. I'll see you aren't badgered by the police again, tonight, but you'll have to tell them the truth tomorrow. Understand?"

"I must go home. I'm all right. I must go home."

"That's exactly what you're not going to do. If you try to insist I shall tell the police I believe you are mixed up in something you daren't tell them. You are, aren't you?"

"You devil!" she whispered. "How dare you! I'll see you—"

"No, you won't."

"I must go home!"

"You can give your addresss at the hospital and your parents will be notified at once and come to you."

"I don't live with my parents. I won't go to hospital."

"You will or else!"

They were both furious, Tim because she defied him and seemed to be wholly without gratitude for what he had done, the girl because of her abiding fear.

Above, there were sounds of activity, a few thumps, a few short orders. The engine of the launch died. A voice said, "This way. I've got them both below here."

Two ambulance men appeared and a helmeted policeman, who carried Tim's duffle coat and jacket over his arm and his shoes in his hand.

"Picked up on Hammersmith Bridge, sir," he said. "Yours, I believe."

Tim put them on, feeling much more like himself, the nightmare quality of the last hour fading rapidly. He went ashore ahead of the stretcher with the girl to find out what arrangements had been made.

"Waiting to hear," he was told. "Emergency Bed Service have it. Might be outside the area."

"To hell with the E.B.S.!" Tim cried, furiously. "I'm on the staff at the West Kensington. Where can I find a phone?"

He was able to fix a bed for the girl, whom he described as an accident case with query fractured ribs and severe shock. He was also able to check that his presence had not been needed at the hospital since he left it.

In the ambulance he said nothing to the girl at all. Nor when she was transferred from the stretcher to a trolley and wheeled into the hospital. But at the entrance to the ward, while the night nurse was organising her reception, he leaned over her

and said, “I’ve admitted you as an accident with damaged, possibly fractured ribs, left side. You fell in the river at a broken bit of the parapet. Understand?”

“Thank you,” she whispered and caught at his hand. “It won’t be any good, but thank you for everything.”

Chapter Two

Jane Wheelan struggled into her white working coat in the tiny cubicle set apart for non-resident staff of the Radiography Department at the West Kensington Hospital.

Four girls and Miss Gleaning used this cubicle, which was no more than one of the changing rooms for outpatients sent to the department. It was totally inadequate. There were only three hooks on the walls for five coats. There were no lockers, no shelves. There would not have been room for them. There were five small stools extracted from the hospital store by a threat of rebellion. On these, or under them, the girls put their handbags, their hats, (if any), their shoes, if these differed from the ones they wore in the department. For years Matron had fought an unproductive battle to secure a proper changing room with lockers for all the non-resident staff. But the Ministry, pandering from political fear to the voracious general public's demand for luxury drugs, pep pills, tranquillisers and so on, for which they, the public, paid about a twentieth of the proper cost, had forbidden all piecemeal interior development in what had been, like many others, a Poor Law hospital or workhouse before the reformation of 1948.

So Jane, beset with other people's clothes so that movement of any kind was difficult, struggled into her white coat, while the patient who ought to have been using this cubicle to undress in, sat on a bench outside the department, waking.

Miss Gleaning, a handful of ward papers in one hand, came towards her as she emerged.

"It's going to be a busy morning, Jane," she said, severely.

"I'm not late, am I?"

She glanced at the clock on the wall of the department. She was not late. Apparently the others were all early.

"No. But you're the last. You usually are."

"I stayed late yesterday. Nearly two hours."

She wanted to add, 'and no overtime', but held her tongue. Miss Gleaning was the dedicated type, the kind that made progress in the profession impossible. A single woman, in her

forties, with no interests outside her work. Nothing would make her understand that the younger generation were just as interested, just as committed, but not prepared to give up a private life and a wider experience outside the job, not prepared to be exploited, overworked and underpaid, simply because their consciences would not let them neglect patients with real diseases, would never, in fact, allow them to strike.

So she waited, hoping the unprofitable, veiled rebuke, that had no real substance, was over. Miss Gleaning understood the girl's antagonism and sighed. When she herself was young she would not have dared to say even as little as Jane had done. She would have found herself standing before Matron at the end of the day, listening to a sermon that ended in her dismissal for insubordination, knowing the competition was fierce and she must plead for her job. Now it was the other way round. Radiographers were worth their weight in gold, but the gold was not there.

She handed Jane a paper.

"This girl came in last night. Nightingale Ward. Emergency. Some kind of accident. Query fractured ribs, left side. Very vague. She should be down from the ward by now. They don't seem to have her name. Miss Query. Will you see what you can make of her before you start and let me know?"

"Yes, Miss Gleaning."

She went through the department to the room where stretcher cases from the wards or casualty arrived. She recognised a nurse from Nightingale standing beside a trolley and went up to her. The nurse stood aside. A white face framed in a mop of untidy white-dyed hair stared up at her.

"Sheila!" Jane exclaimed. In spite of the hair, which had been light brown, and the eyes, fixed, hard, full of an unaccountable resistance, she was sure of the recognition.

But the girl continued to stare and said nothing. It was the nurse who said, brightly, "Well, you never expected to see a friend of yours so soon, did you, Miss—?"

"Burgess," said Jane. "You *are* Sheila Burgess, aren't you?" She was puzzled, uncertain how to go on, with a response so entirely negative.

Then the girl spoke, using a hard voice, as unlike her former self as the unnatural pinkish-white hair and the hard eyes.

"Yes. I'm Sheila Burgess and you're Jane Wheelan. You stayed in this racket, did you?"

Jane, suddenly angry, looked at the paper in her hand.

"You've hurt your ribs? Left side? Is that right?"

"Haven't you got it down? Doesn't it say?"

"It says. But what about you? Where d'you feel it? Incidentally, how did it happen?"

Jane was aware of the nurse opening and shutting her mouth, trying to gain her attention. But before she could turn aside from the trolley to speak to her out of hearing of the patient, the latter shot out a thin arm to clutch her sleeve.

"Jane! Oh Jane, let me tell you myself! Let me, *please*!"

Tears had begun to run down the white cheeks, sobs shook the blanket.

"Of course, tell me anything Sheila, don't! You're ill. You'll hurt yourself."

Jane took hold of the trolley, nodding to the nurse, who stood aside. She wheeled the girl into a corner of the room, then bent to listen to a story confused enough, incomplete, but startling in its implications. At the end of it, Jane said, soothingly, "Did you actually bump anything? I mean, those ribs—"

"I think I bumped the bridge—the stone under the arch in the water—it sticks out—I couldn't avoid it."

"You mean as the current took you through?"

"Yes. I can swim, you know. I was swimming on my back. I didn't see how near the stone I was. The water rushed me through!"

"Have you any pain this morning?"

"On my left side, yes. But I think it's only stiffness. They put a strapping on."

"We'll have a look."

Jane beckoned the nurse back and went in search of Miss Gleaning. The latter listened to her report impatiently. She was very busy that morning.

"You actually *know* the girl?"

"Slightly. I haven't seen her for years. Five years, I suppose. We did a photography course together. She's changed a lot—"

"Has she any bone injury? Where?"

Jane told her.

"Get on with it yourself, then Sounds like attempted suicide.

That's not our concern. Only her ribs."

Seeing Jane's face set in lines of contemptuous anger, she added, "I'm sorry. To me this is one patient among many. Most of them want to live and I'm here to do my part in helping that on. Suicides—"

"She's not a suicide," Jane said and turning abruptly, went back to the other room.

After the photographs had been taken and the nurse had wheeled Sheila away, Jane remembered what she had said to Miss Gleaning and wondered why she was so sure of it. Then other work claimed her and she put the strange case out of her mind.

But later in the morning, when, with two of the other girls, she was having a quick cup of coffee the whole thing came up again in an even more interesting light.

"We haven't seen the hero of the hour yet. Or have we?" one of them said, smiling at Jane.

"I don't know what you mean."

"You don't! I thought you had the jump-in-the-river girl to do yourself? Am I wrong?"

"I'm still not with you."

"Really, Jane! You know there was a suicide emergency admitted last night?"

"I doubt if it was really attempted suicide. But go on. I know the girl you mean. I've just let her go back to the ward. I think her plate's negative. What about her?"

"Well, don't you know who pulled her out of the water?"

"It said something about the River Police on her notes. I didn't read it all."

Another girl said, "You're hopeless, Jane. It was a front page splash this morning. Mystery girl in the Thames. Heroic rescue."

"Not in my paper," she answered, wishing at once that she had not said this, though it was perfectly true. She went on quickly, to cover it up, "Tell me. Please."

"Our Timothy Long."

"Beech-Thomas's registrar?"

Both the other girls nodded. Jane laughed. She remembered bumping into him only the afternoon before. She remembered his clever, not very good-looking face red with annoyance and confusion. Some muddle over a gallbladder series, wasn't it?

Yes, the report. And Dr Milton at his most icy.

"You mean to say he actually went into the river after her?"

"That's right. Held her up till the police launch got there. Fixed a bed for her here, too. Can you imagine? She can't have been looking her best in the water, can she?"

"Perhaps he chased her on to Hammersmith Bridge and she jumped over to get away from him."

"Not a hope, poor chick," the other girl took it up, laughing. "Down he came after her and grabbed her and now he's got her right under his thumb!"

If it had been anyone else whose ribs she had just photographed and yes, anyone other than the baffled young man keeping his temper so bravely, remembering to apologise for colliding with her while no doubt wishing her in hell first, Jane might have laughed, too. As it was she shook her head, putting down her cup and turning away.

"I happen to know the girl you're making those cracks at," she said, over her shoulder. "Her name's Sheila Burgess. We did photography together, once. There's nothing funny about what happened last night. Nor about Mr Long, either."

By the end of the morning the West Kensington hospital was in a state of siege. From an hour or two before dawn the building had been infested with journalists all hunting for the hero and heroine of the 'river story'. They had been frustrated because the night porters, old and experienced in the ways of the Press, had refused to give them the whereabouts of either protagonist and Night Sister, furious with the creeping, whispering groups she found in the corridors, had driven them away to the best of her ability.

But the journalists, equally experienced, more ingenious, practised various unsuspected methods of evasion. At first light they crept out from their places of hiding. Some had gathered stories from junior nurses, some had switched to fascinating tit-bits gleaned in Casualty. All these hurried away. The more persistent, intent on the original story, were winkled out and escorted to an outside door. The Hospital Secretary issued three orders; all doors were to be locked, except the Casualty entrance; notices were to be put on other doors to this effect; at Casualty a concentration of porters would admit journalists singly and escort them to his office where he would present each

with a typed bulletin. The bulletin told them what they knew already and not a thing more.

So neither Sheila Burgess nor Tim Long were troubled with unwanted, impertinent questions. But the questions, for all that, existed and grew larger as the hours passed. For Sheila's X-ray pictures, as Jane had guessed, were declared totally negative. Dr Milton's report, very brief, noted 'no bone injury.' The psychiatrist, also called in, reported, 'no evidence of mental disease of any kind. The patient is suffering from shock after a very frightening experience'. This, like many psychiatric reports, merely confirmed the conclusions everyone else had arrived at without special training in that field.

During the afternoon a collision between a lorry and a mini-van brought three serious orthopaedic emergencies to the hospital. They had to be admitted. Sheila was occupying an orthopaedic bed on no valid grounds. The orthopaedic registrar, the houseman and Sister in Nightingale wrangled mildly in Sister's room.

"She's not fit to be discharged," Sister said. "She'd do it again tonight."

"Not she," the houseman said. "Properly got the wind up. Later, perhaps."

"We must have that bed," said the registrar. "I've got an old woman with both legs smashed I'm going to fix within the next half-hour. Three cases into two beds won't go. The other two are men."

A knock on the door brought Tim into the room.

"Afternoon, Sister," he said. "Can I speak to that girl?"

"Which girl, Mr Long?"

"Don't know her name yet. The one I admitted last night."

"Nor did we know her name, for she wouldn't give it, until Miss Wheelan recognised her down in the X-ray."

"Blimey, does someone actually *know* her?" the orthopaedic registrar exclaimed, seeing light ahead.

Sister explained the situation, adding a little bitterly. "If you'd made a better diagnosis, Mr Long, she wouldn't have been in my ward at all."

"It had nothing to do with diagnosis, as well you know," Tim grinned at her. "Your bed was the only one available in the whole hospital, so she had to have an orthopaedic complaint,

didn't she?"

"I've a good mind to report you," Sister told him, not meaning it. She knew him too well to be really angry. He was a lad after her own heart. It was the patient first every time and to hell with rules and regulations.

"Well, I'll be damned!" laid the houseman. "I call that the absolute bloody limit! Sorry, Sister!"

"If her ribs are whole, as you say," Tim went on, disregarding him. "why not transfer her to the medical side?"

"Have we a bed, or will you now diagnose acute pneumonia?" the orthopaedic registrar asked.

"She may still get that; the Thames was pretty cold last night," Tim said with perfect seriousness. "She'll have to be under observation for a few days yet."

Sister held out her telephone to him.

"Would you like to arrange the transfer straight away?" she said and her voice held a note of menace none of the three young men would have dared to challenge.

A few minutes later Tim said, "O.K., Sister, that's fixed. Alexandra seems to have disgorged quite a packet this afternoon. And one on the waiting list to come in today has gone off to Bournemouth instead on her own. So my girl can have her bed."

"Perhaps you'd like to go in and break it to *your girl*? Her name is Sheila Burgess. Bed Twelve."

"Oh, I'd recognise her by the hair."

"Would you? We've got three bleached that colour, besides her. The albinos, we call them."

Tim went into the ward, suddenly feeling a shyness he had not expected. He was relieved, therefore, to see a girl in a white coat already seated beside Sheila and in earnest conversation with her.

He went up to the bed on the other side.

"Well, Sheila," he said, gently. "How are you feeling today?"

She turned her head slowly. It was clear that she did not recognise him. Why should she, he told himself, feeling deflated and also strangely glad. They had not seen each other's faces in the water; after they were picked up neither had been fit to register much.

He went on looking at her, saying nothing. She was pretty, he

decided, in a washed-out, rather haggard way. Washed-out, haggard? Naturally. What else could he expect at this moment? It was a weak face, though. A small personality, incapable of bearing strain. A small intelligence, too. What the hell—a very ordinary girl, millions of them. He was ashamed of his inner wish to have saved a prodigy.

"This is Dr Long." Jane Wheelan touched Sheila's arm and the girl turned her languid gaze away to Tim, no curiosity nor even interest showing in her light blue eyes.

"Dr Long," Jane repeated, "who saved your life last night."

The blue eyes closed and tears began to fall from under the lids and run down to the pillow on either side of her head.

It was an uncomfortable moment for the two who watched her. Tim was disconcerted, Jane was sorry for him and indignant with Sheila. She said in rather a hard voice. "Aren't you going to thank him? He risked his own life, didn't he?"

Sheila opened her eyes; there was a flash of spite in them, covering the misery they held.

"He didn't have to, did he? I never asked him to."

"Then why did you raise your arm when you saw me leaning over the parapet of the bridge? If you hadn't done that I wouldn't have recognised you as a human being in the water. I thought your cry for help was a seagull."

She did not deny it. She said despairingly, all spite gone, "I was afraid."

"Quite. You didn't want to drown. Very right and proper."

"I wish now I had."

"Why?"

Jane intervened. "I've asked her that, but she won't tell us."

"Did you expect her to?"

Jane flushed at the icy note in his voice. Tim was exasperated. What did this girl from X-ray think she was doing taking on herself to question a would-be suicide? No, that wasn't fair. He didn't believe Sheila was that. But this other girl wasn't to know. Or was she?

"You're a friend of hers, aren't you? You recognised her in Out-Patients?"

"When I was taking an X-ray of her ribs. Yes."

"You're—"

"Jane Wheelan."

"I saw you yesterday."

"I've been here over a year."

"I've been here six months."

They laughed. Sheila looked from one to the other, her own expression relaxing in the happier atmosphere.

"Now," Tim said, turning back to the bed. "All buddies together, you see, Sheila? Listen. Your ribs are O.K. though Dr Milton, the radiologist, thinks they may be bruised. So we're going to fix you up with some more strapping to make you really comfortable."

"Then I don't have to stay here?" she said, eagerly, lifting herself in the bed, then catching at her side and sinking back.

"Not at once, but soon," he answered. "We're going to move you to a medical ward because this bed is needed for another emergency. A serious surgical one."

"I'd rather go home. I must go home!"

"Why?" Jane asked again. "We can let them know. If you'll give me an address I'll see it gets through."

"No. No! I don't want anyone to know I'm here. To know I didn't drown. No one—"

"But the newspapers have got it already," Tim said, watching her closely. "They weren't allowed to bother you, but the hospital secretary gave them a bulletin. Probably he didn't give them your name. But they know you're here."

"But I asked you!" Sheila cried, looking at Jane. "I begged you not to say—"

"Miss Gleaning had to have your name when I told her I knew you. For your papers, the records, the nurses. Sheila, please, please, let us help you."

"No one can help me. No one. I wish I was dead. I wish they'd —"

She stopped her own mouth with both hands, staring at the others from terrified eyes.

"Look," said Jane. "Here's Nurse with your strapping. I'll come and see you again later this evening in the other ward."

Tim followed Jane into the corridor. Here they met Sister and told her their fears.

"What we need is her parents, if any," Sister said. "From what I've seen of her she's in trouble of some kind. Not the usual, but serious trouble all the same. Get her home address out of her,

Miss Wheelan. Or the place where she was living in London."

"It might be the same thing," Tim suggested.

"Nonsense. After what the newspapers put in we'd have had an inquiry that fitted, wouldn't we? There've been half a dozen from London families for girls who hadn't been in all night. None like this one. You get hold of her parents' address, Miss Wheelan, then we might get somewhere."

"I'll try," Jane answered, doubtfully.

Chapter Three

But she was not successful. Sheila refused absolutely to allow her parents to come to London. But she did, after much patient persuading, agree to write to them, saying that she was due for a short holiday in a few days' time and would like to spend it at home.

"I'm afraid they may hear what has happened from the newspapers," Jane told her. "I don't know if we can hold out on your name indefinitely. Oh," she went on, as Sheila sat up in violent agitation, "the Staff have been asked not to give it to the Press. But you know what they are. Anything for a story. 'The Mystery Girl in the Water' is what you're called at present. The doctors and nurses won't give you away, but I'm not sure about the cleaners. I heard one of them say 'Who does she think she is? All this fuss about—' "

Jane stopped. The rest of the cleaner's words as she remembered them were 'about a mixed-up little tart who's only got herself to blame, I wouldn't wonder'. So Jane covered up her pause by adding hastily, "Someone could take a bribe to let the cat out of the bag. Don't you think you ought to tell your people what really happened?"

"I can't," Sheila said in a low voice, sinking back on her pillows. "I can't tell anyone—ever."

Jane looked at her. They were getting nowhere and she felt her sympathy weaken in face of this iron obstinacy. And stupidity. For Sheila was going to give her a letter to post, so she would see the address and had every intention of writing it down for her own use. At present she would keep it a secret from the hospital authorities and the snoopers. But even this was against her inclination.

She said severely, "You can at least tell me what work you've been doing since we were on that course together."

"Photography. Private firms."

"More than one?"

"Oh, yes. I ought to have stayed in my second job. The money was good—"

"Why didn't you?"

"I couldn't help it." She was looking beyond Jane: talking to herself. "I just couldn't help it."

Quite evidently she was not going to explain. But her meaning was clear enough. Some man, Jane thought. It's nearly always some man.

"Why didn't you stay in radiography?" she asked, to bring Sheila back from her painful contemplation of her past.

"The money wasn't good enough."

"I know. It never is. But the work—"

"They run you off your feet, don't they? And pay you less than the cleaners? Or not much more? What sort of life can you get on that?"

Jane was silent. Anything she might answer would sound too unutterably 'square'. But she was ready to defend her vocation, if not directly.

"And what sort of life *did* you get?" she asked. "Not exactly what you wanted, was it?"

She expected a healthy outburst of anger or a fresh onset of despair, but got no response from the girl at all. Sheila simply shut her eyes and tears once more welled from the closed lids and dripped down to the pillow.

"I'm sorry," Jane said, instantly remorseful. "Look, you're going to write home, aren't you? Do it now and I'll post the letter." Still remorseful to the point of honesty she added. "I shall be the only one to see the address. I won't show it to Sister or anyone. You'll be fit to leave the day after tomorrow, I think. I'll check that with Dr Long if you like. Oughtn't you to get some message to your present boss? Is that a photographer?"

"Yes. But I'd rather he didn't know."

"What about wages due to you? And notice?"

"I'd rather just leave it."

"What about where you live? Your things?"

Sheila seemed to be too crushed or too indifferent to make any plans. But she gave Jane the address of her lodgings and agreed to her settling the current rent with the landlady.

"Will you be going back there after your holiday at home?"

"I suppose so. I don't know."

"But not to your present job?"

"No! Oh, *NO*!"

Employer trouble, Jane decided. Or was Sheila just simply bonkers? Not that mental states were ever simple.

Jane went away and came back with writing paper and an envelope. Sheila had not changed her mind. In fact she seemed to be rather more calm, though no happier. Jane took her letter when it was sealed, made a note of the address of the girl's lodgings and left the ward.

In the corridor she met Timothy Long. He smiled and was moving past her, but she stopped him to ask when Sheila would be leaving.

"Not my pigeon now," he said. "You'd better see the chap in charge."

She remembered that the physicians were now in authority, as she would have realised when the girl was moved into a medical ward. It worried her, because they might think she was presuming too much on her slight acquaintance with the patient.

Tim saw her anxiety.

"What's the trouble?" he asked, kindly.

Jane explained.

"I was just going to have a word with the girl myself," he said. "About that strapping. After all we put it on in Nightingale. Good enough excuse. I agree with you. She's in a non-medical mess of some sort and she's no suicide. I'll get her out of the psychos' clutches if I can."

"Then will it be all right for me to go ahead getting her things up here for the day after tomorrow? I'm off tomorrow afternoon, so I could do it then. Collect a suitcase and clothes and pay her rent?"

"I don't see any objection. I'll have a word with Sister. She didn't mind my barging in over the transfer."

"Thanks very much."

Jane went on her way, feeling rather less confused by he strange position in which she found herself.

The next day in the afternoon she went to the house near Shepherd's Bush where Sheila rented a bed-sitting room on the second floor. The landlady, Mrs Coates, who lived in the semi-basement of the house, opened the door. She was a tall woman, untidily dressed in a worn skirt and shapeless cardigan over a washed-out but fairly clean blouse.

"They're all out," she said, moving to shut the door.

“No, wait!” Jane said, quickly. She handed over a note from Sheila which explained the situation.

“Miss Burgess was taken ill in the evening two days ago,” Jane explained briefly. “She had to be taken to hospital.”

“Drinking again?” asked Mrs Coates, sharply. “Or would it be the other thing?”

“What other thing?” Jane asked. The landlady’s manner was far from reassuring, a mixture of defensive aggression and a cringing wish not to offend.

“I don’t quite understand what you mean,” Jane said, hoping to satisfy her curiosity and perhaps discover something important about Sheila’s strange behaviour.

“She says ’ ere you’re a friend of ’ers,” Mrs Coates answered, suspiciously.

“Yes.”

“Then why d’you ask?”

It was clear to Jane that she was unlikely to be allowed into the house if she showed any further ignorance, so she smiled and said, “I expect she was living it up a bit. Anyway, she wants to go straight home from the hospital, so she sent me round to get some of her things. And to give you this week’s rent.”

Mrs Coates’s face brightened a little at this news and stepping to one side she let Jane move into the narrow hall and shut the door behind her.

“Four pounds, ten,” Jane said, producing the notes and added, “I’d like a receipt, please.”

“You can go up,” Mrs Coates told her, taking the money. “Second floor, back. Not hearing a word from ’er, I left the room as it was.”

“Won’t it be locked?”

“Didn’t she give you no key?” Again Mrs Coates’s face folded into grim suspicion.

“I’m afraid she lost her handbag when she was taken ill.” Jane explained. “Doesn’t she mention that in her note?”

Mrs Coates read the message again, nodding sourly, after which she walked up the stairs in front of Jane, fumbling in the pocket of her drooping cardigan as she went.

Neither the house nor its owner were really dirty, Jane decided, only seedy, drab, depressing in the extreme. Sheila’s room, where Mrs Coates left her, pattering away downstairs to

write out the receipt for the rent, was the same. The furniture was old, unpolished; the curtains and bedcover faded, creased; the small rugs on the cold grey-brown linoleum had a tattered fringe at the ends and bare patches in the middle.

Jane shut the door, shivering a little. The window was fastened, she saw, and the room was both very cold and stuffy. On the other hand it was not untidy. Sheila had made her bed, cleared away the remains of her breakfast. If she had had any breakfast on that last morning, Jane thought. And why not? Hadn't Tim and she both decided it was not attempted suicide? In which case the girl had not left the house intending never to return. So apparently she had some sense of order. She was not the pathetic helpless slut it would be easy to imagine. As Sister and the nurses in Nightingale undoubtedly regarded her.

Jane moved slowly about the room, looking first for luggage of a suitable size, which she found almost at once in the shape of two suitcases on top of the old-fashioned wardrobe. Having laid these on the bed and propped them open, she moved to the equally old-fashioned tall chest of drawers, whose top carried a small mirror and a large collection of photographs.

Though her purpose was to open the drawers and choose some clothes to take to the hospital Jane found her attention rivetted by these photographs. To begin with they all bore the photographer's autograph in a bold scrawling hand, Ronald Bream. Sheila's employer, surely? In the second place half the photographs were nude studies both of men and women, in the style known to the trade as 'art'.

Jane smiled. So this was perhaps why Sheila had been so shy about her job. Silly kid. Personally she preferred her art in the form of paintings, but there was nothing wrong with these photographs. Some of them were quite attractive. The human body could be beautiful, though more often than not it wasn't.

She carried a few of the female nudes to the window to get a clearer view of them. Yes, as she thought, Sheila had been the model for several. So what? So, nothing. They were totally harmless and the girl had a pretty figure.

Having put the photographs back on top of the chest Jane pulled open the drawers and began to pack. It did not take her long to collect a reasonable set of clothes. The wardrobe held two town suits, a few dresses and a top coat. Also several pairs

of cheap, fashionable shoes all looking very uncomfortable to wear. Jane put in two pairs and finding some flat-heeled sandals under the bed added them to the collection.

It was more difficult to decide about the oddments. A stiff nylon hair brush, a comb, all the cosmetics on display among the photographs, washing things from the old-fashioned wash basin behind a screen in one corner of the room, handkerchiefs, a headscarf. What else?

Searching in the top drawer Jane found a small jewel case, little more than a decorated wooden box. It appeared to be locked, but as she turned it on its side to fit it into the suitcase, the lid fell open and the contents scattered on the floor and roiled about the room.

With a muttered curse Jane stooped, to gather them up. There were strings of beads of varying lengths and colour, earrings to match some of the beads, an artificial pearl necklace, a very pretty marquesite bracelet and brooch. Besides all these there were a few worthless objects, bits of table decoration, trinkets from Christmas trees, obviously sentimental souvenirs of dances and parties that girls of Sheila's disposition hoard and treasure.

When Jane had filled and fastened the suitcases she took them on to the landing. There was no sign of Mrs Coates either there or on the stairs, but she heard voices from the hall, one a man's, and concluded rightly that another visitor must have arrived.

She hesitated. Perhaps the man would carry down the suitcases, while she took the overcoat and mackintosh. She could not possibly manage the lot in one journey. But if it was only a tradesman below, or worse still a prospective lodger, he would almost certainly be unwilling to help. Moreover, Mrs Coates would be annoyed and might become disobliging. Besides, the cases were not locked. If the man came up and handled them he would probably discover this and might help himself to some of the contents while she went upstairs again to take a final look at the room before leaving. Jane reproved herself for taking such a poor view of her fellow-men, but she carried the two suitcases down herself.

A man several inches taller than the tall Mrs Coates was standing in the hall, supporting his weight by a hand against the wall, and smoking a cigarette. He had a thin face with regular features and dark grey eyes, well-brushed dark hair and a neat

suit, with a shabby raincoat pushed back from his shoulders. If he had not been standing in such a careless, negligent fashion, Jane would have thought she recognised a plain-clothes policeman. But unless he was putting on a very careful act, she decided, she must be mistaken.

His first words supported this, also his behaviour. For he heaved himself away from the wall, pulled up the raincoat, which was hampering his arms and stepped forward.

"Let me take those," he said, quietly. "You oughtn't to have lugged them both down at once."

The voice was pleasant, the manner agreeable, if a little too confident.

"I'm a friend of Miss Burgess's," he said forestalling Jane, answering the question that had leaped at once into her eyes. "Mrs Coates tells me she's ill in hospital and you are also a friend of hers. Did she get in touch with you? None of us—I'm a friend of the family, you see—have had a word from her."

Jane hesitated.

"Actually I hadn't seen her for ages," she said, stalling, not answering his question. "I was very surprised when—when I did see her."

This was true, if not explicit. The stranger frowned. Mrs Coates intervened, holding out a folded piece of paper.

"Here's the receipt you wanted, miss. I've told Mr Stone she's paid up her room to the end of the week."

She fixed a stern eye on Jane.

"I'd be obliged, miss, if you'd see the rest of her things is taken out by Saturday. I'll be wanting the room come Monday."

"Oh, but—" Jane was too shocked to go on.

"It's no use your arguing," Mrs Coates said. "She's not sent hut one week's rent and how do I know when shell be back or how she'll pay in future, if she's ill and that?"

It was hard sense and clearly Mrs Coates was not a woman to be swayed by sentiment of any kind. Jane was roused by the man's voice.

"Mrs Coates should have introduced me properly to you. My name is Stone. Gerald Stone. I know the Burgesses. Have known them for years. Sheila's parents live in Reading."

This was correct. An address in Reading had been on the letter Jane had posted the night before. She felt relieved. Some of her

strange unwanted responsibility could be shared.

"I see." she said. "Well, I wonder if you'd mind very much getting hold of a taxi for me while I run up to Sheila's room to get her mac and coat. I won't be a minute."

"I have my car outside," Stone said. "It's entirely at your service."

"Oh, but I can't—"

No one must know I'm leaving hospital, Sheila had said. No one must know I'm going from Paddington. But that was absurd, Jane thought, as she hurried upstairs again. Mrs Coates must guess, had already done so and as for Mr Stone, Gerald Stone, nice name, he knew her parents. He was a valuable link, surely? He ought to speak to Tim.

Back in Sheila's room Jane, feeling more alive, more strenuous than when she first entered it, took a swift look round, partly to see what was left to take away before Saturday, partly to check on anything she had forgotten. Gloves. Better take the warm ones. The others were very fancy, very horrid. Anything under the bed, anything that had rolled away out of the jewel box?

She got down on her hands and knees. The light was poor, but she saw something near the wall beside one of the legs of the bed. She pulled it out. It was a roll of film, used but undeveloped, of a make she did not know, probably not retail, tightly fastened with an extra strip of plain green paper to make sure it could not come undone. Jane slipped it into the pocket of her jacket, fastened her duffle outside, hung Sheila's coats over one arm and ran downstairs again.

Gerald Stone was in the hall, waiting. The suitcases had disappeared.

"They're in my boot," he said. "Come along."

Mrs Coates had gone.

"She was tired of waiting," he said, one hand under Jane's elbow.

"Good-bye, Mrs Coates!" the girl called. "And thank you!"

Outside in the road a long low sports car stood at the kerb. Jane got into the passenger seat.

"Where to, Miss Wheelan?"

Mrs Coates must have given him her name. She was sure she had not. She hesitated. If she gave the name of the hospital she would have to take the big suitcase to Paddington later, because

Sheila had asked her to leave it there and also to buy her a ticket. It would mean less bother and delay tomorrow, Sheila said, though how that worked out except in relation to the ticket, Jane did not understand. But if she asked him to go to Paddington first he would know Sheila's intention. Jane had promised to tell no one.

"The West Kensington Hospital," she said. "That's where Sheila is at present."

He said nothing, did not even look round at her, but drove off swiftly with almost ostentatious skill. At the first red lights he turned to her, his face lit now with boyish pride.

"Like my car?" he asked and laughed.

"Of course," she answered, laughing too. Bless his heart, she thought, he's human, after all.

Chapter Four

Jane led the way into the front hall of the hospital, her companion following with the two suitcases. As he put them down she said, holding out her hand, “I can’t thank you enough. Don’t wait. You’re parked in the Staff reserved bay, so the sooner you’re out of it the better. I’ll tell Sheila of all your kindness.”

A shade of annoyance crossed Stone’s face.

“No. Don’t do that. She might think I was interfering. Unless —” He paused and went on, “unless I could just see her for a minute. Literally one minute.”

“I’m sorry. She’s not allowed any outside visitors at all. And anyway it’s right out of visiting hours at the moment.”

“Then don’t say anything. Not even that I went to her digs.”

He took Jane’s hand, holding it still when the formal leave-taking clasp was over.

“It is good to know Sheila has a friend like you, Miss—”

“Wheelan. Jane Wheelan.”

“Of course. Jane. I’d like—”

She was aware of a presence behind them. Pulling her hand away she turned to see Timothy Long in his white coat, moving out of the head porter’s office near the front door.

“Thought I knew the voice,” he said, cheerfully. “What’s that? Sheila’s luggage?”

“Yes.” she answered, feeling unaccountably embarrassed. “This is a friend of hers. We met at her place. Mr Stone, Dr Long.”

The two men shook hands warily.

“I’m glad to know she has *some* London friends,” Tim said. “Outside the hospital, I mean.”

I Jane began, “It was Dr Long who—” but a savage look from Tim silenced her. Gerald Stone smiled.

“I’m not to be allowed into the mystery, I see. Never mind. I’ll get it from the Burgesses—in Reading.”

“He knows her parents,” Jane explained.

“I see. Are you going down there?”

"I'm not sure. I want to help any way I can."

"Well, she leaves here tomorrow and as far as I know she's going straight home. She's written to her people to say so. At least I presume that's what she put in her letter. So if you ring them up you can get all the latest gen, can't you?"

Timothy's voice was perfectly polite but there was unveiled antagonism in the look with which he regarded the other man.

"Thanks," said Stone, quietly. "Thanks a lot."

He nodded briefly and turned away. Jane went with him to repeat her thanks for the lift and see him start his car. Timothy, left alone in the hall with the two suitcases, stood looking after them.

He was raging inwardly and his surprise at finding himself in this state only augmented it. That smooth operator was no surprise acquaintance as Jane had led him to believe. A man you had only met a couple of hours before did not hold your hand and gaze into your eyes with a goofy expression. And that was what he had seen from the porter's office when he was on the telephone there, listening to words of wisdom from Beech-Thomas. No, she knew him all right. After all, why shouldn't she, since she was a friend of Sheila's? He reminded himself that the friendship had been broken for several years, according to Jane. So perhaps— He swung round, still angry, still puzzled and walked off to the common room in the residents' quarters.

Having seen the sports car sail away through the main gates Jane went in again to the hall. She found the head porter stooping over the suitcases with an expression of strong disapproval on his face.

"I haven't abandoned them," she said, gaily.

"I'm glad of that, miss." The porter smiled at her. He liked Miss Wheelan and was sorry for her and for the other girls under Miss Gleaning, who was not loved by any of the non-medical staff.

"They belong to Bed 12 in Alexandra," she said.

"Miss X. I know. The Press have been up again. Can't seem to lay off. Inquisitive—" He sought for the polite equivalent of what he would naturally say, but let it go.

"Quite," said Jane. "Anyway, she's leaving tomorrow, so can I park the big case with you until then? I'll take the other one up to the ward."

The porter tried the locks on the case.

"This here's open," he said, severely.

"I know. She lost her keys with her handbag in the—er—the accident."

"It'll be at her own risk," the porter said. "I'm not down here all day. I'll tell my mate to keep an eye, but with the comings and goings—you know what it is."

"Of course," Jane assured him. "But Sister would have a fit if I tried to take it into the ward."

"Alexandra? You're right there. You take the little one, miss, and I'll put this fellow out of sight somewhere. Tomorrow morning, did you say?"

She had not said it to him, but Tim had told Gerald Stone, and no doubt the porter had heard. The porters heard everything that went on in the hall. Everyone knew that. It spoke well for their loyalty that they never gave anything away to outsiders.

"Well, yes, tomorrow morning as far as I know," she answered cautiously. "I mean, unless there's a relapse or she alters her plans."

Jane went away and changed into her white coat, though she was off-duty. Then she went up to Alexandra Ward. Sister was pleased to see her.

"Yes, you can go in," she said, with relief in her voice. "She's been getting hysterical again. Really, I think they ought to persuade her to go away for treatment as a voluntary patient. It's obviously mental."

Jane disagreed but said nothing. She found Sheila sitting up in bed staring in front of her, the old listless expression on her face again.

"Well, here I am," Jane said, cheerfully.

"Pull the curtains," Sheila answered sinking back on her pillows.

Jane did so and in the seeming privacy of the cubicle drew her chair close to the bed and described her afternoon, her conversation with Mrs Coates, her success with the packing and her encounter with Gerald Stone. In spite of his instructions she felt she was justified in disregarding them. Something must be done to pull Sheila out of her present apathy.

She was only too successful. At the first mention of his name the girl shrank down in the bed, covering the lower part of her

face with her hand in a gesture Jane had seen several times and which appeared to express an extreme horror.

"You *do* know him?" Jane asked gently, puzzled by the unexpected and violent response.

Sheila nodded.

"He said he knew your family. Is that true, too?"

With an effort the girl murmured, "He's met them, yes."

"But he's not an old friend of theirs?"

"Is that what he said?"

"Not exactly. Not in so many words. But I gathered he meant it. Was he making it up to impress me?"

"No. Why should he?"

Sheila's hand dropped back on to the bed. The look of hopeless despair was on her face again and for the first time Jane began to have serious doubts of her sanity. But she attempted once more to get at the real cause of the girl's condition.

"I wish you could trust us here," she began. "You know we only want to help you. At least you could tell *me*. You know me. I don't live in the hospital. I'm sure I could help you if you'd let me."

"No one can help me," said Sheila, dully. In the same quiet voice she went on, "I'll be all right when I get home. I'll go for a job in Reading and live with Mum and Dad. If they'll only leave me alone."

"Who? Your Mum and Dad? Or the Press? You mean the newspapers, I suppose?"

"The newspapers?"

"You said 'If they'll only leave me alone.' Did you mean journalists or who did you mean? Tell me, Sheila! Please, please *tell* me!"

They were back where they started, with Sheila cowering on the pillows, speechless, shaking.

Jane gave up. She had learned nothing and she no longer trusted Sheila to speak the truth, even about her immediate plans. If they let her go tomorrow, would she travel to Reading or would she dive straight back into her bedsitter in Shepherd's Bush? She might even dive straight back into the Thames.

As she left the cubicle, she saw Sister at the end of the ward and went up to her. Sister was not helpful. She was a plump,

motherly-looking person, but she clearly had no maternal feelings for Bed 12.

"You can tear yourself to pieces for that type of girl," she said, "but you get nowhere in the end. Nowhere at all."

"But surely she isn't fit to leave hospital?"

"I thought you disagreed with me when I said so just now? Not that I want to keep her in my ward. We aren't a psychiatric unit. Physically she's fit enough. Or as fit as many are that do leave."

"Her strapping isn't off yet." Jane was now convinced that Sheila ought to stay where she was.

"Her strapping came off this morning. A good old strapping rash right round to her back." Sister gave a short laugh. "Trust her to be allergic."

"You don't like her, do you? I think she's the most pathetic thing I've ever seen."

Sister sighed.

"You know her, of course. I've got three genuinely pathetic cases in this ward. Tragedies, all of them. They don't compare with Miss Burgess. They want to live, for one thing, and they won't be able to."

It was what Miss Gleaning had said. Jane only felt the more obstinate.

"I still think she needs to stay a bit longer."

"It rests with her as much as anything," Sister said. "We can't hold her, you realise that? She wants to go, there's nothing wrong with her now physically, her mental state isn't extreme enough for a compulsion order, so there's nothing we can do, is there?"

Still hating Sister's complacent tone, Jane had to agree. She looked back down the ward. Sheila, her curtains drawn back again, was beckoning to her with an agitated hand. She went to her and as soon as she reached Bed 12 Sheila caught hold of her, drew her down close and asked in a whisper, "Where are my things? You didn't give me my things!"

"Your clothes for wearing tomorrow are in the small suitcase I've left with Sister. The rest of your clothes and the things out of your top drawer are in the big suitcase. It's in charge of the head porter at the main entrance. It'll be quite safe there."

"I thought you were going to put it in the left luggage at

Paddington and bring me the ticket."

"Well, as Mr Stone was driving me back from your place I didn't like to ask him to go so far out of his way. Besides, you didn't want anyone to know where you were going."

"He'd know," she said. "You told him I was going home."

"Because he knew where your home was."

"So of course it'd be Paddington. He'd know," she repeated, "but thanks all the same." She looked sadly into Jane's face. "That other case of mine. Where exactly has the porter got it? Will it be absolutely safe?"

"It isn't locked," Jane said, truthfully, "because you haven't got your keys. But it ought to be all right."

She regretted this speech immediately. Sheila pushed her away in one convulsive movement. Oh God, Jane thought, these crackpots! You never knew—

"Please, Jane, bring it up here! I won't feel safe with it down there near the entrance, not locked. Anyone could get at it. I daren't leave it there! Please!"

Jane was exasperated, but she clung to what patience she had left.

"All right, I'll get it. I don't know what Sister will say. But I'll bring it up. Do stop being so upset, Sheila. You'll make yourself really ill if you go on fussing about nothing at all."

"*Nothing*! I only wish to God it *was* nothing!"

Jane went away again and spent a little time finding out where Timothy was likely to be that afternoon. He was not operating, she discovered, so he might be anywhere, possibly not in the hospital at all. After several attempts to find him had failed she went down to the entrance hall.

Here another obstacle checked her. The head porter was off duty and his substitute did not know where he had put Miss Burgess's case.

"But you must know were he's *likely* to have put it?" Jane said, desperately.

The man looked vaguely round the office. It was small, square and box-like, the side facing into the hall entirely made up of glass sliding windows, a long table under them, a bank of telephones, a letter rack, a few chairs. No place, Jane realised in which to keep, far less to hide, a rather large suitcase.

"I don't see it anywhere, miss," the porter said, picking up the

receiver on a ringing telephone.

Jane waited for the call to finish.

'Then where *can* it have gone?" she asked beginning to be really anxious now.

"If you ask me—" the man began, picking up the receiver again.

"I just have," Jane breathed, not loud enough for him to hear.

"If you ask me," he repeated, as soon as he could, "I wouldn't wonder if it's been sent up to the ward."

"Alexandra?" cried Jane. "But I've just come down from there. It wasn't there when I left."

"When would that be?"

How long had she spent looking for Tim?

"About fifteen minutes, I should think."

"Ah. He'd have disposed of it when he went off, I should think. Say ten minutes ago. I think you may find it up there, miss."

"You couldn't ring them and find out, could you?"

The porter smiled, his hand moving automatically to plug in the house telephone. After a few seconds he came back to Jane.

"Yes miss. It's up there all right. I understand Sister isn't too pleased."

"I bet she's hopping mad. Thanks a lot," Jane said, happily as she turned away.

Back to Alexandra, she sighed. Another small basinful of Sheila's woes and then home, a solitary, blessed solitary, late tea at her flat in front of the fire, toast and honey and a new novel from the Public Library. She found that Sister had gone off for her own tea but Staff Nurse gave her permission to take the big suitcase into the ward, just to convince the scatty girl in Bed 12 that it had not been stolen. As she staggered in with it she saw the cubicle curtains were closed again. She kept going, however, and pushing her way in heard Tim saying—" it's for your own safety, Miss Burgess. You *will* do as I ask, won't you? Say yes! Let me hear you say yes!"

Then Jane was inside, Tim had sprung to his feet and Sheila who had been sitting upright, leaned forward with a flushed face and said, "Oh Jane, you angel! You found it. I was so afraid someone—" She broke off, turned to Timothy and went on, eagerly, "I've got to clear out! You understand, don't you? I'm

all set to leave— All my things— All that matters Jane's been wonderful. So I'll go home tomorrow. Dr Long. Thank you for all you've done, but I just have to go home."

Jane backed away, stammering apologies. She wanted to get out of the ward, more particularly to get away from the picture of Timothy leaning forward, one of Sheila's hands between both of his gazing into her eyes and saying, "You *will* do as I ask, won't you?" and Sheila gazing back, melting rapidly, on the very point of agreeing. She was furious with Tim; she was furious with herself for interrupting him.

"Don't go, Miss Wheelan!"

It was an order, given in a voice of suppressed fury, quite equal to her own, Jane thought miserably. She made an effort to defend herself, however.

"I understood that Sheila was to be discharged tomorrow and as she asked me to go to her room and bring her things here, I just did that. Was it wrong?"

Tim shook his head, hopelessly.

"Not really, I suppose. But actually since you came back with some of the luggage, Miss Burgess has been in such a disturbed condition—"

Jane protested, but he went on, disregarding her, "So very much worse that we are now advising her to have further treatment—specialist treatment."

"You know what he means, don't you, Jane?" Sheila insisted on being heard. "The luny-bin—that awful shock treatment or something."

"I'm sure rest and a few talks with the doctor will do the trick," Tim told her.

"I can get that at home. My mother has a very good doctor. I've been to him myself sometimes. He'll do for the talks and I'm going home for the rest. So what more do you want?"

Her attitude and appearance had changed profoundly since Jane's arrival. She was lively and confident where before she had been apathetic and fearful. While Tim considered that this was an added proof of her instability, he had to acknowledge that it gave him no grounds for pressing her to sign a form to admit her to a mental hospital as a voluntary patient.

All the same he could not forgive Jane for interrupting him at the moment of success. So he got up from his chair, shook hands

with Sheila, nodded to Jane and left the cubicle. Sheila immediately burst into tears.

"He's gone and he won't see me again!" she wailed.

"Does that matter? You weren't exactly co-operative, were you?"

"I never even thanked him properly for helping me."

Jane began to feel immensely, overwhelmingly bored with the whole business.

"You can write him a nice letter when you get home," she said.

Unconscious of the intended irony, Sheila nodded. Jane lifted the suitcase on to the empty chair.

"Do you want it here or shall I take it out again to Sister's room, now you've seen it?"

"Leave it here, please. But put it under the bed."

"They won't let you keep it there."

"Only till tomorrow. They may not notice it if you push it well under."

Jane did as she was asked to avoid argument and as Sheila now appeared to be fully satisfied, sinking back on her pillows and smiling, Jane left her, picked up her own outdoor things and handbag in the X-ray Department and left the hospital by a side door.

She came out into the road by a small gate a short distance from the main entrance. Cars were parked on both sides of this approach. Walking rapidly, she suddenly heard her name called and turning saw that the car directly behind her on the other side was Mr Stone's and the man himself was leaning from the driver's seat to open the passenger door.

Chapter Five

She walked back slowly, wondering what he was doing there, over an hour since he had left her at the main hospital entrance.

Her surprise must have shown plainly in her face, for Stone said, smiling, “Why am I here? Yes. Well, I just wanted to know the latest about Sheila.”

“We’re worried about her,” Jane said simply.

He frowned, turned to look up and down the road, then said, “Why not hop in and let me take you wherever you’re going? Then you can tell me.”

His manner was very soothing, coming as it did so soon after her uncomfortable brush with Tim. This man was not at all excited, but calm and wise and helpful. Sheila needed a friend and surely this was one; he had already proved it by his solicitude.

So Jane got into the car and gave her address in Arcadia Road, that lay between Olympia and Shepherd’s Bush.

“Not so far from Sheila’s place,” Stone said, as they moved off. “But a different kind of set-up, I’m sure.”

“I share a flat with a girl who’s at the L.S.E.”

“What was that?”

“The London School of Economics” Jane told him, put out a little by his ignorance, which did not match the impression she already had of him.

“Mr Stone.” she began, formally.

“Gerry,” he said, keeping his eyes on the road. “Gerry’s the name, Jane.”

“I said I was anxious about Sheila,” she went on, ignoring this interruption, though it pleased her. “You see I don’t think the hospital people understand her. I mean the nurse and—and the doctors.”

All her resentment, her anger with Tim, rose up again.

“Go on, tell me,” Gerry said, quietly.

“Particularly Tim—I mean Dr Long. He seems to think now she’s having a real mental breakdown. He wants her to go to a mental hospital for treatment.”

She saw Gerry's hands tighten on the wheel, and went on, "He's furious with me because—" She stopped. Sheila had begged her to say nothing about her immediate plans. It would he a gross breach of confidence to describe the fuss over the suitcases. Besides, she did not really know the man beside her, whose profile just now was far from prepossessing.

But the next moment Gerry's face relaxed and he gave her a brief smiling glance that removed her doubts at once.

"It's not important," she tried to explain. "Only medical details. Anyhow he couldn't persuade her and that was partly my fault, so he's furious with me."

"Is that all? I don't see quite how it affects Sheila."

"No. of course not. I'm being stupid. What I mean is she *won't* do as he wants and she *is* going home tomorrow."

"I see."

They drove on in silence for a few minutes, then Gerry said, "You know that doctor friend of yours isn't far out about Sheila."

"How d'you mean?"

"She's been unstable before. A couple of years ago. She nearly had to go away, then."

"*Really*?"

"Yes. I'm not kidding. The place where she works, well, it belongs to a friend of mine—"

"Ronald Bream," said Jane, remembering the photographs in Sheila's room.

The car swerved a little, but Gerry's face did not alter. "Greasy in patches," he said. Then, a second later, "She's told you about her work, then?"

"Oh no." Jane explained how she had noticed Bream's signature on the photographs in Sheila's room. She did not describe the photographs, but when Gerry gave her a sideways glance, full of secret amusement, she flushed and laughed.

"Art pictures, most of them," she said. "You knew she posed for them, I suppose?"

"Naturally. Does that shock you?"

"Not really. Anyway, it's nothing new. And I'd rather have these photographs than most of the women on beaches with bikinis on. You have to have a really marvellous figure to take a bikini. Most of the women who wear them just haven't. They

bulge in all the wrong places."

"Too right. What was I saying?"

"That Ronald Bream, the photographer, is a friend of yours."

"Yes. And a couple of years ago when Sheila first began to work for him she turned up one morning and threw a fit of hysteria."

"Had he just suggested she might model for the nude?" Jane asked.

Gerry looked round at her again.

"You're a cool customer, aren't you?"

"I'm in medicine," Jane answered. "I see nudes every day. I don't get any kick at all, from either sex."

"So it seems."

"You were talking about Sheila."

"Yes. Well, they had to call a doctor and she had some treatment or other and was away a couple of weeks as far as I remember."

"But she went back to her job? The same job?"

"Oh, yes. Ron took her back."

"Then it can't have been anything to do with the art photos."

"No, it can't, can it?"

"You mean she's really, basically, a bit twitched? Poor Sheila."

"Exactly. Now are you satisfied why I was hanging around the hospital, wondering how to get in touch with her, what to do to help the poor kid?"

Jane blushed, tongue-tied, annoyed with herself on so many counts she felt she would like nothing better than to get out of the car and run away. For she had begun to wonder if she might be the attraction that had kept Gerry waiting outside the hospital. He had certainly worn a faint air of triumph when she appeared. But really it was all his anxiety about Sheila. So much for vanity, she decided. How idiotic can you get, when the slightly older man has charm?

In her confusion and remorse, both on her own account and Sheila's, she said, impulsively, "I'm really grateful to you for telling me. Neither Dr Long nor I thought at first that the suicide theory held for a moment, though the other staff did. Now he agrees with them and I suppose I must too. We didn't know what you've told me. We thought there must be some real reason—an outside reason, I mean—for her perfectly genuine

fear. It's certainly there, Mr Stone—Gerry. She's scared of everything, her job, herself, her parents, her friends—"

"Which friends?"

Jane remembered in time that she had promised Gerry not to mention him to Sheila and that she had betrayed that promise. This added to her sinking opinion of herself, both her judgement and her integrity.

"Anyway," she said, not answering his last question, "she's made up her mind to go to Reading tomorrow morning. So we shan't have any further responsibility, shall we?"

Gerry did not answer. They had just turned in Arcadia Road and he was slowing down, looking at the numbers of the houses.

"After the next turning on the right," Jane said. "The fourth house on the right—now!"

Gerry stopped the car at the kerb but did not attempt to get out. Jane began to fumble with the door on her own side.

"Don't go in yet," Gerry said, pulling out a packet of cigarettes from his pocket and offering it to her.

"I don't," she said. "Not worth the risk—or the money." Gerry made a face at her.

"Little Miss Salvation Army, are you? You won't get a convert here. I'm deep in sin."

He said it with a low laugh of inward pleasure. But Jane was kicking herself again and did not notice. She had the door open now and was moving to get out of the car.

"Why the hurry?" he asked.

"I want my tea."

"I could do with a cuppa myself."

She was properly caught, she realised. After all his kindness that afternoon it would be too churlish not to invite him in.

"Can I give you one?" she said, lightly, hoping he would refuse.

But he merely thanked her, left the car, locked the doors, and followed her into the house, up the stairs and into her flat.

Whereas when she left the hospital Jane had looked forward to a solitary tea in her own room, now she would have been delighted to find Mary, with whom she shared it, at home. But there was no welcoming light in the windows and in spite of the electric radiator in the small hall, the whole place felt cold and cheerless.

“I’m sorry,” she apologised, turning on lights and fires as she moved about. “Mary isn’t in yet.”

“I don’t mind. Why should I?”

Jane did not answer this but having taken him into the sitting-room went off to the kitchen to get the kettle on to the stove. When she had assembled the tea she carried the tray to the other room, where she found Gerry sitting by the fire reading the newspaper. She had only had time to glance at the middle page that morning, but he was not reading the middle page. He seemed to be absorbed in the financial news that she never read herself.

Conversation during the meal became more and more trivial. Gerry seemed to have retreated to some inner place of his own. She wondered why, if his interest in herself was so short-lived, he had forced upon her this invitation to the flat. After a time, however, it became clear that he was still thinking about Sheila Burgess.

“You’ve a very nice place here,” he said. “I wouldn’t have thought—if what you say about a radiographer’s money is correct—”

He looked at her with one comically raised eyebrow. Jane, inclined to resent his impertinence, could not help laughing.

“It’s Mary’s flat, really,” she said. “I share, but not exactly halves.”

“Nothing like having rich friends,” said Gerry.

“We happen to have been at school together,” Jane answered, stiffly. He was getting a bit too offensive, she thought. But his next words swung her back again.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I was only kidding. What I really mean is you’ve got a very nice flat and plenty of room in it, I’d think. I was wondering if you couldn’t suggest to Sheila that she stays with you for a few days before going down to Reading. No, wait a minute!” He raised a hand as Jane began to object. “Let me finish. I don’t want her family to be so upset by her state that they, too, think she’s in for a real bad breakdown. Apart from anything else, they’d have it in for me for not looking after her better. D’ you see what I mean?”

‘Perfectly,” Jane answered. “All the same I don’t think Mary would fall for it. And the flat is hers, as I told you.”

“But you yourself would be willing?”

“I don’t know. I’m out all day. I couldn’t really look after her, could I?”

“Perhaps not. But perhaps some of her friends might come round to see her.”

This was something Jane had not considered at all. Sheila’s friends. Had she any? Surely she must have. But where were they and why hadn’t she wanted to see them? She hadn’t named a single one, not one.

“Do you know any of her friends?” she asked. “We don’t. She simply insisted that no one at all was to know about her or see her before she goes home.”

“Of course I know them.” Gerry’s eyes brightened. “I know what! I’ll introduce you to some of them. Ron Bream, too. Tonight.”

“Tonight? Where?”

“Two of the people Sheila sees most often are throwing a little party tonight. I was asked but I said I was too worried about Sheila. What d’you say I go after all and take you with me?”

“Where?”

“Tom’s studio. Chelsea.”

“Is he another photographer?”

“No. But he lives in a studio. He knows a lot of artists, too.”

“What time?”

“I don’t remember. Late-ish, I think. Wine and cheese touch. Shall I ring them up and say we’ll come? Do come!”

It was tempting. It was new. Whatever she thought about Gerry, and her feelings had fluctuated wildly between attraction and anger all that afternoon, it might be useful to meet some of Sheila’s friends. She still had no intention of having the girl to stay in the flat. Anyway, she was sure Sheila would never agree. But it might help her know that her friends were sympathetic and would rally round when she felt strong enough to come back to London, to her job.

“Yes,” she said. “I’ll come. I’d like to meet them. D’you want to ring them from here? When should we start? What do we wear?”

“Anything,” he told her. “You’ll be charming in anything.”

“No. I mean how informal?”

“Completely informal. Chelsea has all its variety. Tom paints a bit and his wife, too. He makes commercial designs from her

abstracts."

"Doesn't she object?"

"Not if he sells them."

A strange world, Jane thought, but worth a visit. She knew she was pretty well bogged down in the utterly different world of the hospital. It would be a pleasant change to go right outside it for once.

"Ring up, then," she said. "I'll change."

She put on a black silk skirt and a white evening jumper. When she rejoined Gerry she found him sitting down again, staring at the electric fire. He jumped up as she went into the room.

"You look fabulous!" he said, warmly.

"Will they have us?"

"Of course. I was wrong about the time. It's a six to eight do. It sounded well warmed up already. I could hardly get what Tom said."

She looked at her watch. Seven o'clock. She was astonished. They must have wasted over an hour over tea.

"Aren't we too late?"

"Good God, no. If we start right away."

"I'll get my coat. Turn out the fire, do you mind?"

She put on a new top coat that she had bought only a week before. As they drove off she wrapped its soft folds over her knees and leaned back in her seat. It was really very pleasant to be driven about in a fast car by a very competent driver whose admiration for her appeared to be growing hour by hour. Did she really like him? Well, enough to enjoy this evening in his company, at any rate. What a question to ask herself, she thought, when she'd only known the man for a little over five hours. She laughed aloud.

"Happy?" Gerald Stone asked, putting out a hand to touch her lightly.

"Yes, I am," she answered, laughing again, and found that he was joining in her mirth.

Chapter Six

The party, as Jane expected, was in full swing when they, arrived. The studio, on the top floor of the house, was an attic room with a skylight uncurtained and partly open. In spite of this the heat was almost unbearable, for a big stove, its front open, blazed with piled coke and at the opposite side of the room, in a recess where the ceiling was too low for anyone to stand, a long electric radiator spread another cloud of suffocating warmth.

Jane drew back from the door of the room.

"I can't go in there in my coat," she said, "I'd die on the spot."

"You don't have to. Give it to me and I'll park it with mine."

He was helping her off with it as he spoke. When she turned he had disappeared. But a few seconds later, while she waited, as she hoped, out of sight of the crowd, he came back, took her hand in a friendly gesture and led her forward, searching about for their hostess.

It was a very mixed crowd, Jane saw, of the sort of people one came across in the espresso bars and small dimly-lit restaurants all over Fulham and Chelsea. They were very variously dressed, as Gerry had said they would be. A number of the girls wore drab black and brown, had seaweed hair floating on their shoulders, thick woollen stockings and high boots with ridiculous little high heels like the principal boy in an old-fashioned pantomime. There were men to match these girls, with dirty sweaters and corduroy slacks and untrimmed scruffy beards round their weak chins. At the other end of the scale there were very highly-painted, stiffly coiffured girls, in tight bright satin, jewelled with sequins; also one or two in long narrow skirts slit up one side. Very few of the men were dressed for the evening, whatever their women had on. Most of them, like Gerry, were in sober town suits.

"There they are!" Gerry said, over his shoulder, continuing to push his way through the crowd, making a path for Jane. "Hi, Tom! Toni!"

A thin young woman, in a long white chiffon dress, turned her

head towards them, waved a glass in the air and called back, “Come right in, Gerry!”

“Easier said than done” he shouted back, tripping as a girl in front of him, trying to move away, dropped a long woollen stole round his ankles. Jane stooped to pull it away, the owner snatched it from her with a loud, four-letter curse and Jane stood up, red with anger and effort, to find the painted face of her hostess peering at her.

“Jane Wheelan,” Gerry said. “Meet Toni.” He half-turned and catching hold of the man beside him by the arm, added, “Tom.”

Jane greeted them both politely and waited. The girl with the unruly stole had swept away, the whole incident had been trivial, rather ridiculous and she did not want to talk about it. On the other hand there was nothing whatever to say except that the room was far too hot and held far too many people. This being unsuitable as an opening gambit, she said nothing.

“Sorry we’re late,” Gerry said, cheerfully. He handed on to Jane a glass of champagne Tom had just produced and held out his hand to the latter for another. “Jane is a world’s worker,” he went on. “World benefactor, I ought to say.”

“What at?” Toni asked, languidly. She did not look much interested. This stung Jane into saying, “I’m a radiographer. Gerry wanted me to meet you because I used to know Sheila Burgess.”

Toni’s face changed, or rather it tightened and grew even more blank than before. Jane watched her. The makeup was nearly perfect if you liked that heavy kind, which she herself did not. It must be useful, though, she thought. It effectively prevented any slight change of expression. And from a distance made a pretty picture. But not from near to and not when you could see the eyes looking out from their black rims and green lids with uncontrolled surprised anxiety.

It was Tom who spoke.

“You’re very welcome,” he said heartily. “Any friend of poor little Sheila—” He let his voice sink to a whisper in Jane’s ear. “I’d like a word with you later on, if I may. Mustn’t spoil the party just now. Wait till they push off.”

Jane nodded. She had not wanted to embarrass anyone. Tom’s reaction to her mild reference to Sheila surprised her. She did not know now what to say except to murmur that Gerry had

brought her, would he taking her back and she wasn't sure how long—

"He'll want to stay," Tom finished for her. "That'll be for you to dictate, won't it? Toni always makes the going for me."

"But I only met Gerry today," Jane said, stiffly.

Tom took no notice of this, but moved away with a bottle in each hand, filling glasses as he went. As soon as he was out of earshot, which was almost at once because the noise in the room had reached shouting pitch, Toni pressed nearer to Jane and leaning forward to speak into her ear, much as Tom had done, she said, "How is she?"

"Sheila, d'you mean?" Jane said in a raised voice.

"Hush! Don't shout, for God's sake! Yes, the poor kid."

"Better. Much better, I think."

Toni nodded, but leaned forward again.

"Are they going to send her away? They ought to, they must do, mustn't they?"

"D'you mean to a mental hospital?"

"That's right. She's up the wall, isn't she? Properly up the wall."

Jane drew back. She had no intention of discussing Sheila in this place either with Tom or with his sympathetic wife. So she merely said, "I'm only a radiographer, I'm afraid. I don't even meet the psychiatrists."

"But you must know what they're going to do with her," Toni said in her ear. Her voice had risen from a whisper to an impatient, demanding whine that nearly deafened Jane at such short range. She began to feel resentful.

"No, I don't," she said. "No one is going to *do* anything to her or with her or for her without her consent. It's a free country isn't it? Up to a point, anyhow," she added, feeling ashamed of trotting out the old cliché so glibly.

Toni's eyes took on a hostile glare but all she said was. "I thought you were a friend of hers," and turned away, leaving Jane alone with a circle of backs hemming her in.

She locked about her, desperately anxious to go home now. If these were Gerry's friends then she had no wish to cultivate him any further. She began to move very slowly towards the door of the room. But she had not gone more than a few steps before she found Gerry at her side and saw just behind him two men who

appeared to be with him.

"There you are!" Gerry shouted heartily. "Where's Toni?"

"I don't know," said Jane, allowing her total indifference to show in her voice. "I think I really must be getting back now."

"But you've only just come!"

One of the men behind Gerry pushed forward as he spoke with hand outstretched. "You must be Miss Wheelan. Sheila's friend. I'm Ron Bream, her boss. Or should I say her late boss?"

"You're late all right," said the other newcomer, also pressing forward.

"Ron's partner, Giles," Gerry said, watching Jane.

She shook hands with the two. The photographer himself was middle-aged, rather stout, carefully and neatly dressed. His partner, considerably younger, wore a dinner jacket and spoke with a marked Mediterranean accent in spite of his English name.

Jane said, gravely, looking at Ron, "I'm afraid Sheila won't be coming back to work for you, Mr Bream."

"I'm sorry," he answered gently. "But Gerry has told me about the breakdown. Perhaps, later on—"

His partner interrupted, in a high-pitched impatient tone, "It is useless to speak here. Impossible to hear what is said. Where is Tom?"

Gerry took Jane's arm and pushed her gently forward.

"Tom's gone to the other room," he said. "We'll find him there. You chaps coming?"

They formed a group about Jane as they moved slowly to the door of the room. She was not unaware of this, resenting it slightly but unable to resist the pressure on each side of her. They went along a short passage and into another room, smaller than the first, but empty of people except for Tom, who stood near an electric fire, smoking a thin cigar.

"That's better," Ron Bream said. "Give the lady a drink, Tom."

"No, really, thank you," Jane said. "I've had quite enough already. I think I really ought to be going home."

Her persistence seemed to disconcert the men around her, who stood looking at her with puzzled, frowning faces. But Gerry said, after a short pause, "So you shall, Jane. We all know you're doing a grand job, don't we, Tom? Mustn't send her up to the hospital tomorrow with a hangover. She might take a picture

of the wrong end of the patient."

There was loud laughter at this, quite uncalled for by his feeble joke, Jane thought. But she consented to sit down for a few minutes though she still refused another drink and made it plain by her attitude that only good manners prevented her from leaving at once.

"We ask too many bods to these shows," Tom said, making a wry face. "Toni's fault, really."

"I wasn't even asked," said Jane, trying to smile. "I ought to apologise."

"Now don't take him up like that," Ron protested. "Any friend of Gerry's—"

"Any friend of poor little Sheila," said his partner.

"Exactly. Now we can hear each other speak won't you tell us a bit more about her, Miss Wheelan?"

With persistent questions, frequent suggestions, total disregard of her repeated wish to go home, they gradually bore down Jane's resistance. It was all done with outward good nature, consideration and politeness. But she felt the ruthless purpose behind it and though at first it stiffened her resolve to say nothing that mattered, in the end she was too angry and too exhausted not to break it.

She jumped up, said briskly, "Now I really am going. You can't do anything more to help Sheila just now. She's as sane as I am and nothing can keep her in hospital against her own wishes. She's discharged herself, she's off tomorrow morning and by this time tomorrow she'll be with her parents in Reading."

They could not stop her now and at last they seemed to give up their strange interest in the sick girl. They shook hands with Jane, saying they hoped to meet her again soon, hut they did not follow her out of the room. Gerry, who had gone instantly to fetch her coat, was nowhere to be seen in the passage. It was curiously quiet there; the party seemed to have broken up at last.

But as she waited, not quite sure where Gerry had gone, one of the rougher looking young men appeared suddenly beside her.

"I heard you say you were a friend of Sheila Burgess's," he said, curtly.

"Not *again*! Well, yes, I used to be."

“Used to be? Not now?”

“Yes, now again. Since her—accident.”

“You’re another model, are you?”

“Me? I’m a radiographer. At the West Kensington.”

A look of frank horror passed over his face. Jane thought she understood.

“You said model. Are you an artist? Did Sheila model for painters as well as for her photographer? I know she did that.”

“You do?” His face went hard now. He said, slowly. “If you’re a genuine friend of hers tell her she’d better look out for herself, will you?”

“Why? Anyway, she’s going home tomorrow—by train.”

“Then tell her she’d better not travel alone. I mean that. Seriously.”

“What *do* you mean?” Jane thought his dramatic manner rather silly. It matched his long hair and his beard and sloppy, dirty clothes.

“Frankly, I’m not with you,” she said impatiently, turning away her head to look for Gerry.

But when she turned back again the young man was gone and Gerry appeared the next instant, his own coat and hers over his arm, her handbag in his other hand and profuse apologies on his lips.

Chapter Seven

Gerry was silent at first on the drive back to Jane's flat. At last he said, "You didn't enjoy the party much, did you?"

His frankness was embarrassing. Jane temporised.

"I never do like big parties, really," she said. "Even when there are people there I know. Too much noise, so you can't have any sort of conversation. Too much drink. I like my wine best with a meal. When you don't know a soul there, like tonight, it seems pretty pointless."

"It wasn't pointless," he answered, gravely. "Didn't you realise how upset Sheila's friends are by this whole painful business?"

Jane did not know what to say. Her main impression had been that the worry, the anxiety of Sheila's loving friends, was less for the girl personally than for the effect her actions and their consequences might have on all of them. But she could hardly give these cynical views to Gerry, who seemed to be the only one genuinely concerned with Sheila's real welfare.

"Was she very important to Ron's business?" she asked. "I mean, I know she modelled for the art photographs. I saw them in her room, as I told you."

"Did you really recognise her in them?" Gerry asked. "The lighting is usually arranged to make the face a silhouette or partly in shadow."

"I know."

"You really did recognise them, then? Sheila didn't tell you?"

"No. She hasn't told us anything at all about her work. That's one of the mysteries or a symptom of her illness. She—she seems to be absolutely scared of the whole set-up."

She could have added that though Ron Bream was not particularly formidable, the thin character, Giles, with his cold eyes and long yellow face had certainly sent a few shivers down her spine. But she held her tongue. She was tired now, tired physically, for her working day was spent mostly on her feet and she had been standing again nearly all the evening, and tired mentally, tired of Sheila, her problems, her misfortunes, her refusal to help herself, all the deadly boredom of the un-

cooperative patient.

She said, irritably, “I can’t help feeling Sheila’s making a lot of fuss about very little. If she doesn’t like her job, why can’t she just give notice and leave in the normal way? Why all the melodrama? Whether she fell in the river on purpose or by accident, she was rescued and the best thing she could do would be to get her parents to come and fetch her from the West Kensington. But of course the silly clot won’t hear of it. I’m wondering if she really means to go to Reading or if she‘ll skip off somewhere else.”

“Why should she?”

Gerry’s question was the obvious one, but his voice was too eager.

“Oh, don’t you understand?” Jane cried, in exasperation. “I thought you knew her. Isn’t it all a fantasy? Isn’t she dramatising herself to the limit? Why don’t you go down to Reading with her, if you really want to help?”

Jane saw that they were already in Arcadia Road and nearing her flat. Gerry brought the car in to the kerb, stopped and turned towards her.

“If I thought she’d let me, of course I’d travel with her,” he said, quietly. “But you told me she absolutely didn’t want to see me.”

“Yes, that’s true! Oh, why are some people such idiots!”

Jane’s exclamation related to the whole of Sheila’s behaviour, but Gerry evidently took it as a personal compliment, for he put an arm across Jane’s shoulders, smiled at her and said, very softly, “*You* wouldn’t turn me down like that, would you, Jane? You’ll come out with me again, won’t you?”

She wanted the evening to finish. Another argument, about herself this time, would be unbearable. So she smiled at him and said, lightly, “I expect so. I’m always around.”

“You’re wonderful,” he said, drawing her a little closer. “I know we’ve only met today, but I feel I’ve known you for years.”

Hopelessly unoriginal, Jane thought, for a man of his age, especially. She yawned; she really was half asleep, she realised.

“Thank you for—everything,” she said. He had certainly been useful earlier in the afternoon. The party had been a dead loss, but that wasn’t his fault.

Gerry drew her closer still and gave her a long, experienced

kiss. More exciting than was good for her, Jane thought, drawing away from him and turning to unfasten the car door.

He did not try to stop her or continue his advances. He just sat and watched her, smiling a little. When she was out of the car and turning to say good-night to him, he said, “Tomorrow evening? Same time?”

Jane pulled herself together.

“Sorry. Not tomorrow.”

“Another date?”

“No. A home session with Mary. My flat partner.”

“Scrap it.”

“Can’t. Sorry. Good-night and thanks again. Thanks a lot.”

She shut the car door, turned and ran up the steps to the outer door of the flats. It was locked. She had not realised how late she was. She stood for a few seconds raking her bag for her keys, found them and opened the door. Gerry had not driven away yet, but he had not followed her to the door as she had been half afraid he might. She looked back as she went in. It was too dark to see him but she noticed the glow of a cigarette. He had been lighting up. That was why he had waited. Not on her account. So much the better, she thought, stifling her unreasonable disappointment.

Upstairs in her room she took her handbag under the light and stirred its contents. When she had searched for the door keys she had been aware vaguely of some change in the contents. Now she knew. There had been a colour film of her own in the bag waiting to be developed. She generally dealt with her black and white films herself, but always sent the colour ones away. Or rather handed them in to a local chemist to be processed. It had been in its tin, which was tied up in its yellow bag. It must have fallen out at the party. If so it would be at the house. She was disagreeably surprised to find she had no idea where the place was. Somewhere in Chelsea, somewhere between the Town Hall and the river. But she remembered neither the name of the street nor the number of the house.

There was only one way to get her film back. She would have to ask Gerry. Again she checked. She did not know where he lived, either. So unless he tried to see her again she had no means of tracing her property. Well, it served her right. All the same, she was pretty sure she had not seen the last of Gerry. Her

confidence was based on his kiss, which lingered agreeably in her mind.

Thinking about her film reminded her of the spool she had found on the floor of Sheila's room. She went to her cupboard and felt in the pocket of her everyday jacket. It was there still, so she took it out and put it in the handbag she used on workdays. She wrote in her diary a reminder to take the film up to the ward before Sheila left the hospital. After that she went to bed and slept heavily, without dreams.

She woke to a knocking on her door. Mary followed the knock and came to her bedside, looking down at her in some surprise, for Jane was usually the first in the flat to leave her bed.

"What were you doing last night?" Mary demanded. "Living it up somewhere by the look of you."

Jane, struggling into full consciousness, looked first at her watch, then, stung by what it told her, leaped up.

"Gosh! I'll be late!" she said. "Be an angel and get the coffee going."

"The coffee has been waiting for you for the last half-hour. Egg?"

"Shan't have time."

Jane was already at the door, making for the bathroom.

"There's toast. I'll have to go myself in five minutes."

"Don't wait."

Tearing into her clothes, swallowing coffee that was far too hot and toast that was stiff and cold, Jane cursed the activities of the day before, that had so exhausted her. Her thoughts were totally on her work, on not breaking her good record for punctuality, on not annoying Miss Gleaning, who already considered her rather too independent in her bearing. With effort and concentration and the abundant energy that made both possible, Jane managed to arrive at the West Kensington only a little later than Miss Gleaning and ahead of one of her contemporary colleagues.

The work began that morning with a positive explosion. A wall on a demolition site in the neighbourhood had fallen. Major casualties among the workmen were being admitted, minor ones among the passers-by, struck glancing blows by falling stones and timber and iron scaffolding, were lined up outside the department waiting for investigation of possible fractures before

being treated. Until noon Jane was at full stretch. After that the pace slackened, but there was a back-log of patients from the wards booked for investigations of various kinds, besides the usual morning crop from casualty and from general practitioners of sprained joints and supped spinal discs.

It was nearly two o'clock before Miss Gleaning told Jane to go off for lunch. She went to the changing cubicle for her bag and as she took her powder compact from it to attend to her face she saw Sheila's film.

"Damn Sheila!" she thought. "I've still got her on my back."

She tore up to the ward. Sister had just come back from her lunch. She looked disapprovingly at Jane.

"Miss Burgess was rather upset you didn't come up to say goodbye to her," she said severely.

Jane flapped her hands.

"Don't say she's *gone*!"

"Of course she's gone. You knew she was going this morning."

Yes, she had known; it would be stupid to pretend she hadn't.

"We were absolutely gummed up in the department," she said, shaking her head to clear it, for she felt stupid, almost dizzy from exhaustion and lack of food, having had no real breakfast and no dinner after the party, either. "We had a whole heap of query fractures from a big accident."

Sister nodded. Surgical work was outside her province and her interest but she knew the Radiography Department was under-staffed and often pushed to the limit.

"Never mind," she said. "Miss Burgess had no right to expect more of you than you did. But these mental cases are so demanding. She asked me to thank you. She had the grace to do that."

"Have you got her address in Reading?" Jane asked. She would have to send on the film.

"No. She wouldn't give it to me. I think you posted her letter for her, didn't you, Miss Wheelan? If I'd handled it myself I'd have copied down the address."

And probably steamed open the envelope and read the contents, Jane thought. Sister in Alexandra would not be above any unorthodox means of helping her patients.

"I only remember it was in Reading," Jane said. So she could not send on the film. She would have to keep it until Sheila

wrote to her. If she ever did write.

She turned away. The film was in the top pocket of her white coat. After she had had her lunch she went back to the department and put the spool in a little-used drawer below a cabinet of records. It would be safe there until she wanted it again, she knew.

The afternoon work was light in the Radiography Department. Following the morning of exceptionally hard work the girls were able to relax a little, sort films more carefully, even discuss cases and the clearness or otherwise of the pictures they had taken.

But the easier atmosphere made Jane's exhaustion and anxiety only more apparent to her. Her head felt stuffed with cotton wool in place of brains, her legs and feet ached, her mouth was dry, her throat sore. Probably a germ picked up at that beastly party, she thought, savagely. Never again. Be a bit more choosey when you meet a man for the first time, even if he does have an attractive face and an easy manner.

As the afternoon wore on Miss Gleaning noticed her chief assistant's pale face and listless manner, but she said nothing. Girls were only too prone to fall sick at the slightest suggestion of illness and anyway a periodic falling-off of energy was natural, not that Jane Wheelan usually displayed this symptom. All the same she was a good girl and did work hard and regularly, so Miss Gleaning was inclined to be indulgent for once.

"Jane," she said. "Just run up to the theatre with these films for Mr Beech-Thomas. They're old ones he wanted me to look out for him. The patient didn't attend for two years after his operation. Letters sent to him returned, address unknown. Now he's appeared again, a very sick man. His own fault, chiefly. They've taken him in as an emergency and he'll be down here tomorrow. In the meantime Mr Beech-Thomas wants all his notes and films. Here you are. He's operating, I think, but you can leave them in Theatre Sister's room."

"Yes, Miss Gleaning."

Jane went on her errand, walking slowly because that was the best she could do. Outside the operating theatres she met Timothy Long, leaving.

"Hullo," he said. "Want someone in there?"

"Mr Beech-Thomas."

“Left five minutes ago. Short list for him today. Through by four.”

“We were slack this afternoon, too. But this morning—Funny how it happens like that.”

“In waves? Yes. Is it urgent?”

“Is what urgent?”

“The old man?”

“I don’t know. He wants to see these notes and films, Miss Gleaning said.”

Tim looked at the large envelope in Jane’s hand.

“*That* chap! I should think he does want them. Bloody idiot went off and disappeared into the blue as soon as he left here. Hasn’t seen a doctor since. Carried on as if he was cured. No follow-up treatment, no checks, nothing. Now he’s dying, of course.”

“Cancer, was it?”

Tim nodded.

“Would it have made any difference if he had come back?”

“It might have. A couple of years more, perhaps more than that. A few seem to get right away with it. We don’t know. Can’t know unless people do as they’re told and keep reporting to us, and get their follow-up treatment.”

“Some people find that impossible.”

“You’re telling me. Little Miss Burgess, for one. Did you see her before she left?”

“No. I couldn’t get away to the ward till after lunch-time.”

“Nor me. She was out of the place, baggage and all, before ten, Sister told me. Taxi to Paddington. She’ll be home by now, but I bet we don’t hear from her again, any more than this chap.”

He tapped the envelope under Jane’s arm.

“I almost hope we don’t,” Jane said. “Except—”

She was going to tell him about the film, which she would have to send on, somehow, but she checked herself. Forgetting it the way she had made her look such a fool. She did not want Tim to think her totally inefficient.

“Except what?” he asked, looking at her curiously.

“Nothing.”

All the time they were talking they had been moving along corridors and down stairs in the direction of the front hall of the

hospital. Now it was in sight, just ahead, and they both stopped.

"I'll just see if he's still in the hospital," Jane said. "If not I'll give this to Simpson."

The head porter, she knew, would see that the package reached the surgeon somehow.

"O.K.," Tim answered. "Be seeing you."

He turned away, feeling a little disappointed that the conversation had come to an end. A nice girl, he decided, not wildly exciting, not madly beautiful, but someone you could talk to without wondering what she thought of you and whether you were making an ass of yourself.

Jane continued on her way to the front hall. Mr Beech-Thomas was 'In', the consultants' board told her.

"He really is, do you think?" she asked Simpson.

"Mr Thomas never forgets to clock out," the latter told her, reprovingly. "Some of the others, I have to do it for them. Not him."

"Have you any idea where he'll be?" she asked, wearily.

"As a rule at this time he's in the theatre this day of the week."

"I've been there. He's finished."

"He don't take tea. Is it that emergency admission, miss? Name of Parker?"

"Yes, it is."

"Then I should say Mr Thomas is having another look at him. Proper upset he was. And no wonder. Silly ba—"

Simpson swallowed the epithet. Jane smiled.

"I agree," she said. "Which ward?"

"Victoria, miss."

"Thank you very much."

Simpson nodded genially and leaned forward through the window of his office.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he asked, politely.

Jane, who was moving away, looked round. There was no mistaking the plastered locks, the fuzzy beard, the dirty sweater, the greasy corduroy trousers and broken-down suede shoes. It was the so-called artist who had spoken to her after the party last night.

She was so astonished that she stopped and he recognised her.

"It was you I came to see," he said, moving forward eagerly.

“Oh? Why?”

Feeling Simpson’s astonished gaze burning into this recognition, Jane flushed angrily.

“Has she gone? Oh, say she hasn’t gone!”

“If you mean Sheila Burgess, of course she’s gone. Early this morning.”

“Did you see her? Was she all right when she left?”

“I didn’t see her. I couldn’t. We were too busy in the department. Sister could tell you if you go up to Alexandra Ward.”

“No,” he said. “Pointless. Too late. Oh, *God*!”

He turned and stumbling a little, went out through the big doors and down the steps, leaving Jane staring after him.

“Beatnik,” said the head porter, with pursed lips. “Screw loose, I should say. Friend of yours, miss?”

It was said politely, but Jane felt it as an insult.

“Certainly not. I met him, or rather he spoke to me for the first time, last night”

“You want to be careful,” Simpson advised. “The types that get around these days. Not fit to be on the loose, really. But you can’t touch them or they have the law on you.”

Jane did not wait for the end of this homily. She hurried away to Victoria Ward and was relieved to find Mr Beech-Thomas in consultation with the senior physician, the radio-physicist, and the radiologist, at the bedside of the erring patient.

She delivered her envelope, received absent-minded thanks, and went back to the department. Miss Gleaning was ready to leave; there was no further work to be done.

Jane bought a newspaper on the way home. She did not look at it until she was sitting by the fire with her tea on the table at her side. But when she unfolded it and saw a short paragraph on the front page, she pushed the tray from her, laid her head on the table and wept.

Chapter Eight

Sheila Burgess had left the West Kensington that morning with very mixed feelings. She was thankful to escape from the pressures of kindness and medical interest that were beginning to wear down her resistance. She had consented to take a short note from Sister to her parents, explaining why the hospital authorities had agreed to her own desperate insistence upon secrecy. Enclosed with the note was a duplicate of the official form, signed by herself, stating that she took her discharge against the wish of her medical advisers. This envelope had been pinned to the lining of her jacket as it might easily fall out of her topcoat pocket if she took the latter off during the train journey. Sheila had left the envelope where Sister had pinned it. She thought it might help her to explain her arrival, unannounced, to her parents.

For the letter she had given Jane to post had held no such intention, though she had pretended it did. She had headed it with her old address in Shepherd's Crescent and had said quite simply that she might be able to get home for a short holiday in the near future and that she would write again. Nothing about her rescue from the river, about her renewed acquaintance with Jane Wheelan, about her firm intention to leave London for good.

In the taxi Sheila kept her head down, not daring to look out of the windows in case some dreaded eyes should meet her own from a car alongside, or some recognised face turn to her from the pavement.

She got out at Paddington, feeling weak and shaky, as well she might, for she had done nothing to restore her muscles' tone by walking in the ward during the last few days. She signalled to a porter, feeling too weak to carry both her suitcases to the platform. She paid the taxi and added a small tip, which the driver accepted with frank contempt but no argument.

Having bought her ticket, Sheila found her porter waiting for her and followed him meekly to the platform. She was thankful to find he was prepared to take the large suitcase to the carriage

instead of dumping it at the barrier and leaving her to do the rest. He even went so far as to climb with it into the train, move along the corridor until he found an empty carraige and heaving the case on to the rack say, with satisfaction, “Nice quiet window seat to yourself, miss.”

“Thank you,” Sheila said, timidly. “Thank you very much indeed.”

She gave him a large tip at which he took her other case and threw it up beside the first. Then, saying, “Ta, dear, Cheeribye,” he swung out of the carriage door, pulling it across behind him and disappeared.

Sheila sank down in the corner seat facing the engine and began to feel safe at last. It was dark in the train. The corridor was on the platform side; she was as far away from it as she could get. If only the train could start now, she thought. Reading was the first stop. No one else could get in after they started.

She fiddled with the long string of white poppet beads she was wearing, passing them through her fingers, breaking off a bead and after a moment, pressing it back into the chain. At last, with a sigh, she pushed the whole string down the inside of her woollen jumper, out of sight.

A gentle hand pushed the door open. How silly, Sheila thought. Of course other people are travelling. And in any case in a corridor train they could move about as much as they liked.

At the thought her terror rose again. Anyone could board the train and move along it to her after it was under way.

“Did I startle you?” asked the stranger, apologetically. She was a middle-aged woman, quietly dressed, with a small zipper bag.

“No, of course not,” Sheila managed to say.

The woman sat down opposite Sheila.

“They ought to put the lights on in the station,” she said, opening a magazine and shutting it again when she found she could not see to read.

“We’re very early,” Sheila answered. “Nearly half an hour to go yet.”

The woman nodded, got up, leaving her bag on the seat, and going into the corridor, stood at the open window of the outer door, turning her head from side to side to watch what was going on on the platform.

Sheila began to feel drowsy. This peace, this loneliness, had come too quickly. She longed to forget everything, her time in hospital, her battle with herself and her would-be friends, the memory of her watery nightmare and those other terrible memories of the last year. With a great effort of will she would suppress it all, drive it all away from consciousness, forget it so completely that no one could ever make her betray herself. To this end she stared at the wall of the carriage before her, while gradually her mind emptied, her eyes closed and she began to swim towards sleep.

She woke suddenly and completely as the carriage door slid open again. This time a man and a woman, both elderly, got in with a cascade of small luggage about them.

"There's plenty of room," the woman said, as if continuing an argument. "It's quite empty. I beg your pardon."

This to Sheila, who said, weakly, "The seat opposite me is taken."

"We'll have the other two corners, then," the man said. He began to heave the small suitcases to the rack, panting loudly, his white hair falling forward on his forehead.

"Why bother with all that?" his wife said. "We may not get anyone else in the carriage."

She was seated herself and leaning forward to pull the door across when a big hand checked her and a harsh voice said, "'Alf a mo, lady. Room for little me, I 'ope."

The man who entered was bulky, red-faced and badly shaved. He wore a dirty raincoat and a cloth cap. A sodden cigarette, little more than a stub, hung from one corner of his mouth. As he pushed past the couple he removed this fragment, pinched it with his large squat fingers and said, cheerfully, "No smoking, is it? I'll ' ave to be a good boy, won't I?"

He lowered himself into the seat opposite Sheila, looking at her so directly as he asked this question that she was stung into making an answer.

"I expect there are empty seats in carriages where you *can* smoke. Actually that seat is taken."

The woman who had been leaning out of the window now came in. She demanded her seat quietly. To Sheila's surprise the big man moved to let her take it, disclosing her zip bag squashed into the corner. At this she exclaimed and the man apologised.

“I did mark the seat with it,” the woman said, half apologising in her turn.

“That’s O.K. I’m orl right,” he answered, moving still further to give her more room. He pulled a dirty folded newspaper from an inside pocket and shaking it open, held it up to form a barrier between himself and Sheila. She wished she had had enough courage to buy a magazine before getting into the train. With a porter beside her she would surely have been safe?

The time passed slowly. Two more couples came to fill the carriage, a pair of middle-aged women, more smartly dressed than the one opposite Sheila and a young couple, perhaps on honeymoon, she thought; at any rate going off together for a holiday. They reminded her a little of the sort of people she had met with Ron and Giles at the parties they took her to.

Those parties. How lovely they had been at first, exciting drinks, gay people, silly talk to make you laugh, beatniks to make you wonder, Toni, the perfect hostess, Tom—

She sighed at her memories, checking them as her thoughts moved forward to the last six months and their growing horror and fear and shame.

A whistle blew on the platform. She started at the sound, looking nervously towards the door. Reading first stop, corridor train. Why had she left the West Kensington? Time to go back? No. The carriage jerked, moved, slid past the wall beside her, past the covered platform, rattled over points, gathered speed continuously. She caught a look exchanged by the couple near the door. They were pleased to be on their way. Well, so was she. The young couple were giggling over some private joke and did not seem to have noticed. The woman opposite her was reading a letter she had taken from her bag. The couple beside her were discussing a knitting pattern. The big man, hidden behind his paper, did not move. Probably he was so used to travel of this kind he hardly noticed if he were moving or not.

Sheila wondered idly what he did for a living. He had not spoken like a commercial traveller but she noticed a small brief-case on his knee that she had not seen before. Surely he’d had nothing in his hands when he entered the carriage? Then how? —

She tried to remember if one of the other passengers had arrived carrying this particular piece of luggage. But it was no

use. She had been all intent not to engage the interest of any one of them. She had kept her eyes away from them, her head turned towards her own window. Anyway, what was a brief case? They were common enough, at that.

It was when the train, still gathering speed, had left the suburbs and was running through the first empty fields of the lost lands between town and farm that the people in the carriage began to leave it. Not all at once, but silently, without explanation. The woman opposite Sheila went first; a natural visit down the corridor, the girl thought idly. The old couple went next after another of their silent communicating looks, the signals of eyes and eyebrows. The boy rose next, laughed. “On your toes, ducks,” and pulled his girl to her feet. The middle-aged women rose as one and followed them.

Sheila was suddenly aware that their order of going was exactly the same as their order of coming. Except for the big man, who had not moved, who sat perfectly still with his newspaper held up, hiding his face.

Hiding me, too, thought Sheila. She began to edge silently towards the door, but had not gone halfway along the seat when the newspaper came down on his knee with a bang and his red face was thrust towards her, hard eyes glaring into hers.

With an effort prompted by sheer panic Sheila sprang towards the door, but the man was there before her, moving with extraordinary speed for such a cumbersome body. He clapped his hand over the door handle and said, “No!” not loudly, but with a savage intensity that paralysed the girl’s limbs and made her reel back.

“I—You can’t stop me? I want to go to the toilet!”

“Oh no, you don’t!”

He was standing between her and the door now. Quite deliberately and slowly he turned, looked out into the corridor, waited for a man to pass along it and then pulled down the blinds one after another.

Sheila was trembling; she felt very sick, quite hopeless, numb with terror. When the man turned and began to move forward she retreated before him until her back was against the far door of the carriage, pressed up against it, her hands clutching behind her at the window strap.

“Why don’t you sit back in yer place?” the man asked. “I don’t

slosh skirts—not as a 'abit, that is."

"What d'you want? Who are you?"

She had just remembered the emergency cord. Why hadn't she pulled it when he had his back turned? Too dumb. Too frightened—as usual. Her eyes slid up. Could she pull it even now if she made a spring?

"No dice," the man said, grinning faintly at her. "It's bin attended to."

"I don't know what you mean."

"The emergency. It won't work. Bin seen to."

"But how—? I might have gone into any carriage in the train."

He shook his head.

"Bit slow, girlie, ain't yer?"

"Not the *porter*! He was so kind. He helped—"

"Proper old granddad to yer. That's 'ow 'e gets 'is living when 'e's out of the nick. Which isn't often."

The sickness grew on her and the shaking.

"I shall scream. And go on screaming."

His manner changed. The hard eyes grew colder, narrowed. She was looking at a killer and she knew it.

"Where is it?" he demanded. "Keep me waiting and yer best friend won't reconnise yer."

He had thrust a hand into the brief-case and pulled it out now, the blade clicking open as he did so. With the other hand he reached up and tumbled her suitcases to the seat, one after the other.

"Open up and get it out," he ordered. "Move!"

He kicked out at her, catching her left shin so that she fell forward on to the cases.

"Want another? Move then!"

She fumbled at the smaller case to gain time. Her jewel box was there and the film had been in it. But when she had looked for her beads that morning, the long string, it had not been there. Why, oh why, had she not stopped then, cancelled her discharge from the hospital, at least until she had seen Jane? Why had she been so stupid, so utterly reckless in her desire to leave?

She took up the jewel box, handed it to the man. He shook his head.

"Open up."

If she had hoped he would put down the murderous knife to examine the box, she was disappointed. She unclasped its feeble catch and put back the lid. The film was not there.

"It's gone!" she cried, trying to put surprise into her voice.

"Quit stalling."

"I'm not. I had it in here. It—it must have fallen out. The box doesn't lock—"

"Find it."

She pulled everything out. It was nowhere to be found. Desperately she turned to the other suitcase. Only her clothes there. Why had she thought the film would be with them? Jane had packed the oddments, all of them, in the smaller case, as she had asked her to do. But the film was in neither.

"It isn't here. I haven't got it. You can see for yourself."

The man swore but his orders had been very clear. To get the film at all costs, regardless of how he did it. He snatched up the cases one after the other, feeling the linings, looking for false bottoms. All to no purpose. The girl spoke the truth.

"Then it's on you," he said, pushing the cases away on the seat amongst the scattered clothes. "Give."

Sheila had shrunk back against the carriage door, foreseeing what he would think and do. She was desperate. She had not got the film. It had been in her jewel box, but it was no longer there. This brute could search her, he would search her, rip off her clothes, use her shamefully. He would find nothing. Then he would kill her, horribly, and leave her to be found—

Fumbling behind her back as he came towards her she cried out, "I haven't got it! I swear I haven't! Jane may have it or Gerry. Gerry more likely. I don't know—"

He hit her across the mouth with the back of his hand so that her head struck the carriage window. But her fumbling hand had met the groove of the door handle and her resolve, helped by his blow, which flung her off balance, brought the door open with a jerk. She swung with it and was gone. The door struck the outside of the carriage, rebounded, helped by the wind and crashed back into place.

The man was stunned for a few seconds. His slow brain had not foreseen this possibility, which was doubly disastrous. If she was dead—could she be otherwise at the speed the train was travelling, then there would be inquiries. If she had not died

there would still be inquiries and she would grass this time, the lousy bitch. In any case they would find the film. He had been sent to get it, no holds barred. He had failed. It didn't do to fail the boss. Just keep his mouth shut and fade.

Working very quickly, sweating now in his fear and haste, he re-packed the suitcases, folding the clothes, making a reasonably tidy job of it. When he had finished he fastened them—they were not locked, since Sheila had not replaced her lost keys—threw them up to the rack and going to the door on the corridor side, shot up the blinds. After that he took Sheila's vacant seat, pulled out his newspaper again and began once more to read.

The others trooped back and took their places. The woman opposite Sheila's former place leaned forward and said in an anxious voice, "The girl?"

"She left," he said, not lowering his paper. "Left of 'er own accord."

"But I didn't see—"

"Be quiet." said the old man near the other door.

"Spread out to fill the carriage. The guard is on his way for the tickets."

They moved to obey him. Four a side, quiet, respectable, though the young couple were rather pale, they presented a very commonplace appearance to the guard who inspected their tickets. After he left the carriage nobody spoke. Ten minutes later the train drew in to Reading.

They all left the carriage. The young couple moved into the dining car to continue their journey west, the others left the train and the station. Later that day they would return, to travel back to London on new single tickets, at different times during the afternoon and evening.

But the man who had failed left the station yard, watched the others go into the town and then, entering the Southern Railway part of the station, travelled by slow train to Guildford, where he picked up a fast train to Waterloo, went by tube to Euston, by train to Holyhead and by boat to Ireland. Having been born in that country, though he had lived for ten years in England, he had no difficulty with his powerful frame and recognised accent in finding a job in Dublin. He was not proud of his failure nor pleased at leaving his few possessions in England. He was even more cast down when he remembered that in his surprise, call it

shock if you like, at Sheila's sudden exit, he had not taken the trouble to rub his prints off the suitcases. But thinking it over, he decided that he was less afraid of the Law in England than he was of his former employer.

As the days passed and his work began to bore him with its regularity of effort, he lost his fear of both and began to plan other activities.

Chapter Nine

When Jane's passion of tears had passed, she lifted her head, dried her eyes, poured herself some tea and read again the paragraph in her evening paper that had caused her sudden storm of grief.

Sheila was dead. Her body had been found beside the down line, where it had been observed about noon by the stoker of a goods train proceeding slowly west. She had been taken to Reading, since her ticket showed it was her destination. Her parents were traced in that city; they identified her; they had expected to see her soon, though not on that particular day.

The girl's identity had been quickly proved, the report continued, from papers found on her person, notably a letter addressed vaguely to 'Doctor in Charge', written by a medical registrar at the West Kensington Hospital, London, and a copy of a form stating that she had taken her own discharge from the hospital. An accident was possible, the paragraph finished, discreetly.

Mary thought otherwise.

"Obvious nut case, poor thing," she said, comforting her friend. "You couldn't have helped her more than you did. No one can these days, can they? I mean, the doctors won't certify them on principle. So they all go about killing themselves or other people.'

"It isn't quite as bad as that. More cases are improved than used to be, when they were all shut up indefinitely."

"But the danger remains. What about your registrar? He might have been drowned. People do drown trying to save suicides. I think it's crazy. If they want to be dead, why shouldn't they?"

"Aren't you contradicting yourself?" Jane answered and with tears gathering in her eyes again, went on, "Anyway, I don't think she did. She was frightened of something and she wouldn't tell us. If only she had. She must have been pretty desperate to jump out of a moving train."

Mary said no more. She really knew nothing about the case, which seemed to her to be both pathetic and sordid, but not to

concern her friend too closely. So she left Jane to recover by herself and set about cooking something really attractive for supper. When she had this well in hand she poured herself some sherry and a good stiff gin for Jane, which soon persuaded the latter to take a less apocalyptic view of the world.

The hospital, the next morning, was humming with the news and with very varied assessments of it. There were those who shrugged it off as typical suicidal behaviour about which nothing could ever be done. Others were indignant, because they believed it could have been prevented by more effort on the part of those in charge. Even Miss Gleaning, Jane found, was worried at the failure of the psychiatrist, who had seen the girl.

"If he wasn't sure about her, couldn't he have sent her for observation to a mental bed somewhere?"

"He said he *was* sure," Jane told her, miserably conscious of her own shortcomings. "He didn't think she was a real suicide at all. He thought it was hysteria."

"Then she ought to have been made to give her proper home address and her parents should have been brought here to take her away. We aren't a home for nervous debility or for bad girls either, nor are we a social settlement. We're a hospital."

Sister in Alexandra ward agreed with this and was inclined to blame Jane for not disclosing the Burgesses' address in Reading.

"I know," Jane answered. "I've been kicking myself ever since I posted her letter. But I thought they'd be sure to come. I didn't know she hadn't told them where she was or what had happened or anything. And she only gave me the letter on condition I didn't show it to *anyone*. So I only glanced at the address and didn't make a note of it, mental or otherwise. I can't forgive myself."

Her distress was so evident that Sister began to relent.

"Well, it looks as if our Dr Foley was wrong this time," she said. "So you mustn't blame yourself too much. People are entitled to use their free will, even against themselves. You can't manage everyone's life, though the politicians seem to think they have a right to try."

Sister meant well, Jane thought, going back to her department, but she was really only papering over the cracks in a system that had failed. Too many unrelated minds had been exercised over the problem of Sheila Burgess. No one had tried

quite hard enough, no one had fitted all the aspects of her case together. Above all, no one had really cared, except perhaps herself and Tim Long and neither of them had cared enough.

Tim went to the X-ray Department at the end of the morning to find Jane. He learned that she shared his own feelings of frustration and guilt and was comforted by this. His friends at the hospital had told him the night before, when he was on duty, that he was making a fool of himself. Or else suffering from wounded vanity in finding that the girl he had nobly rescued was so ungrateful as to finish what he had postponed for her.

Jane, too, was comforted and relieved to find someone who shared her haunting belief that Sheila's death was not self-determined.

"I've got a film I found in her room," she told him, eager to confide another source of her anxiety. "I haven't told anyone about it, yet. Ought I to send it to her people or what? I meant to give it to her, but I forgot that evening I fetched her luggage —"

'You were a bit preoccupied, I imagine," said Tim drily.

"You mean Gerry Stone? I only met him that afternoon."

"Quick work," said Tim.

"About that film," Jane's voice held a warning. Tim accepted it, amused.

"Yes, what about it?"

"I've got it here. I wondered if it would show—"

He stared at her.

"Develop it, you mean? Isn't it developed?"

"No. It's a funny sort of spool. Trade kind, I suppose. I've never seen one like it in the shops and there isn't even a maker's name on it. Only a number on the strip of greeny-blue paper round it."

"*Blue*! Perhaps it's a blue film! By all means let's develop it."

"Don't be an idiot!" Jane was annoyed by his flippancy. "Nudes aren't blue."

"What a name for a song! Nudes aren't blue, do you think that's true? If only of you, tum, tum, ti-tum. Few, mew, queue —"

"Oh, shut up!"

"No, really, did she model for the nude?"

“Yes, she did.”

Jane was furious. She thought she had found an ally, but he was only a buffoon.

Tim shook his head at her, then laid a hand on her arm. “After the Gleaning is finished and the chaff distributed^—no, seriously—when the rest have gone home, this evening, stay on and I’ll come here, sixish. We’ll have a look at that film. It might be useful. The Law has been on to us, you know. Yesterday afternoon, actually. They didn’t lose much time after they found her body. I think the film will have to go to them. But we may as well have a peek for our own interest.”

“Yes. Before they come to me. I wonder why they missed me out yesterday?”

“It was all terribly hush-hush. They saw Foley and the other brass who had seen her, not even me, except about the river incident. I was told nothing. I got what I did from the evening papers.”

“Like me.”

Late that afternoon, when the department was empty, Jane lingered, putting in time correcting and checking the order of the files. Some of her junior colleagues, she knew, had a very poor grasp of the alphabet.

From time to time a nurse put her head round the door to ask for Miss Gleaning. Each time Jane said, “Gone home. Can I help you?” but each time the nurse disappeared. Twice Jane went out into the corridor where the chairs for patients led in a long row back to the main Out-Patient waiting hall. No one was sitting there. The stream had dried up for the day, she hoped; the evening’s accidents had not arrived yet.

Tim hurried in half an hour later than the time he had suggested, apologising cheerfully but giving no explanation. She did not expect any. Time depended on the work in that place, not the other way round.

She already had Sheila’s film in her pocket so she led the way into the dark room. This was by way of a narrow, angled passage, designed to cut off all light. Jane moved along it briskly, knowing every inch of the way in the black dark. But Tim, though he had been there often before, had to grope along, a hand on the wall.

Jane switched on a dim red light and Tim saw the row of

sinks, the taps, the frames in which wet films were hung to dry, the rack above the sinks to which the frames were clipped. He stood back out of the way while Jane busied herself with preparing to develop the small spool in her pocket.

As the picture grew Tim moved forward to look over her shoulder.

"It seems to be a sequence," Jane said, "but it isn't ciné film. The figures— Oh!"

"Christ!" said Tim.

Obscenity was a word that had been in very common use for many years. Both of them had grown up with it and were not ignorant of its various commercial realisations. Out of normal curiosity they had both read smutty novels, but being neither prudes nor perverts had found them disappointing, good for neither a thrill nor a laugh.

But this was different. Jane did not need a print from these negatives to recognise the naked Sheila. Dogs in the street, cats on the roof, Sheila and this muscular unknown—

She was shocked, genuinely shocked for the first time in years. Medical training, medical knowledge, the scientific attitude of mind were all very well, she thought, but I like to have my demonstrations clean.

Her hands were shaking a little as she clipped the strip of film to the rack. She could not look at Tim.

"Blue as the summer sky," he said. "I wasn't far out, was I?"

Jane's mind was working again.

"She must have stolen it," she said. "She couldn't bear them to have that record of her. So they killed her."

"Let's get out into the light," said Tim. "The atmosphere in here is altogether too lurid."

He took Jane's hand in his and led her back into the cold bright light of the department. She was still shaking a little. He found her a chair, made her sit down and then moved away to switch on a table lamp with a long flexible stand. He bent it into a convenient position to examine the object he held in his hand.

"What are you doing?" Jane asked, trying to blot out the recurring pictures of Sheila and her partner.

"It's the spool that film was wound on," Tim answered. "Come and look."

She went to him at once.

“Yes. That’s why the actual film seemed to be a bit loosely wound. There must have been something to stick it on, though.”

“Probably. The point is there is no slit going through the stalk of this spool. Why?”

Jane took it from him. Tim was right. This end of the spool could not be used with a new film. So what use *did* it have?

Tim said, sharply, “Without a slit through the middle it could be a container, couldn’t it?”

“Yes.” She looked at him, her lingering disgust showing in her face. “We’ll have to hand it over with the film to the police, won’t we? I felt there was something queer, nasty, about the man she worked for and more still about his partner.”

“Have you met them, then?”

She told him about the party, about her conversation with Gerry and the photographers. She told him about the emotional beatnik and her two odd encounters with him.

Tim let her run on. It was good for her to let off steam, he thought; hard luck on a girl to be let in for this sort of thing, common as it was and probably always had been in some form or other. Only just now it was made more obvious by fashionable publicity and the crazy idea that this sort of minority activity was more ‘real’ than the ordinary life of the majority.

When Jane had finished he said, thoughtfully, “’ D’you know, I think it’d be only fair to let Dr Milton in on this. After all, we’ve used his department for private sleuthing, haven’t we?”

“But Sheila’s dead! The police—”

“I know. I know. Wouldn’t it be better all round if Dr Milton had all the gen and was behind you when you have to make a statement.”

“*Me* make a statement!”

“Naturally. How you got hold of the film. Why you didn’t give it back to Sheila. Why you didn’t burn it at once, undeveloped. They’ll think up some more questions than those, I expect.”

“You’re right.” Jane had gone very pale. She realised she had been very stupid. If she had given up the film at once to the police they might have prevented Sheila leaving the hospital. A very grim thought came to her.

“If I’d given it back to her she might not have been killed,” she exclaimed.

"You mean deliberately killed?"

Jane nodded. It was horrible, but very likely.

"I think so, too. I didn't want to suggest it to you."

Jane began to cry. She was still standing near Tim, the spool in her hand. He took it from her and put an arm across her shoulders.

"You mustn't," he said gruffly. "Look, I'll see Dr Milton first thing tomorrow morning. He's a good chap. He'll know what to do. I expect we'll have to have a positive of the film to identify the characters definitely—"

"I'm sure it's Sheila," Jane said in a muffled voice.

"O.K. but if it is I can identify her myself. You needn't come into it again, except to say where you got hold of it."

Jane nodded, wiping her eyes and blowing her nose.

"Now," Tim said, rather enjoying his role of chivalrous male consoler, "how about my driving you home?"

"Thank you," she said, entirely subdued. "I'll just get my things."

She did so, leaving her white coat in the cubicle. She had to wait in the front hall for Tim while he collected a coat himself. His small car was in the Staff park; they walked there together.

At the flat Mary came into the hall directly they opened the door.

"At last!" she exclaimed, then seeing Tim, stopped.

"Mr Long drove me home," Jane said, introducing him.

"You look as if you needed that," Mary said. She turned to Tim. "Can we give you a drink?"

He smiled. It was a nice change to be with two friendly girls—well, one friendly and one distressed, but open to common sense—after the two chilly nurses he had been trying to cultivate.

They all went into the sitting-room. Jane sank into a chair, feeling desperately tired. Mary got out glasses and bottles.

"That man's been here asking for you," she said, handing Jane her drink. "Twice, actually."

"What man?" Jane guessed, but before Tim she wanted to pretend surprise.

"Gerry something. He apparently turned up this morning, quite early."

"How—? Oh, of course, it was Mrs Baker's day."

"Our twice weekly daily," Mary explained to Tim, who was

listening with interest and watching with amusement Jane's growing confusion.

"Exactly," Mary went on. "He asked when you'd be in and when I saw her at lunch-time she said she'd told him about five. I was back about five myself and found him on the doorstep. He wanted to come in with me but I said as you hadn't answered the bell to him you must be out. I said I had to do a bit of shopping and might as well do it before I went in."

"You mean you went away again and left him standing there?"

"Yes. I wasn't going to have foot-in-the-door trouble and he looked capable of it."

"Good for you," said Tim, laughing. "He'd gone when you got back, had he?"

"I didn't go far. Only to the shops round the corner. I saw his car go past, so I came home."

Jane got up with a jerk.

"He'll come back!" she said. "I know he will. To talk about Sheila. I don't want to see him. I don't trust him! I think he's horrible! I—"

She was out of the room and they heard her own room door open and shut.

"Poor kid!" said Tim softly. "I'd better be getting along, I suppose."

"No," Mary said. "Don't go. At least— Well, I think that man will come back and Jane is in no state to talk to anyone. We've got rather a dull meal coming up, but if you'd stay and share it —"

"I'll go one better," Tim said. "You fetch Jane and tell her we're all going out to find a meal. Then bloody Gerry can ring his fingers off but he won't get an answer."

Mary smiled.

"Take Jane out," she said. "It's just what she needs. But I've got umpteen things I must sort out at home. I'll put the hall light out and I won't answer the bell."

She went off and came back with Jane a few minutes later. The latter was looking very much better and had taken some trouble with her hair and face. On the way down to the main door of the flats she kept just behind Tim and when they heard footsteps on the path outside she gasped and moved closer still.

Tim held her hand as the door opened, but it was only the tenant of the flat below the girls'. He nodded a greeting and passed them. Jane's hand was still in Tim's when they reached the car.

An hour later they were back in the flat, chatting happily, warmed by food and wine. But Tim stayed only long enough to see that Mary was all right and had not been frightened.

"He came again," she said, holding out a small card to Jane. "He rang and rang and then there was a pause and then he dropped this in the letter box and went away."

"How d'you know all that?" Jane said, taking the card.

"I crept into the hall in the dark and listened."

Tim laughed.

"I don't know what you do," he said, "but you'd be a god-send to Scotland Yard."

"She's an economist," Jane explained, but Mary was looking at her sternly and she went no further.

"What's on the card?" Mary demanded. "Read it out."

"It says he must see me and I must ring the number on the card. It's a business card of some sort."

"Will you?"

"I'm damned if I do," she said violently, tearing the card in two.

"That's the spirit," said Tim. He stooped, collected the pieces of card and put them in his pocket. "Back to the treadmill," he said, moving towards the door.

Jane saw him out of the flat. At the door she thanked him, fervently, with a little catch in her voice, but no hysteria.

"Pleasure," said Tim He meant it. He felt on top of the world. "See you tomorrow. With Dr Milton present, of course."

She made a face at him and shut the door. Tim ran down to his car, chuckling to himself. Before he drove off he looked at the card Jane had torn up. 'Gerald Stone, director,' it had on it, with an address in Chelsea. The same address, Tim wondered. Below that studio flat? An office, a cover-business, or the place of work of an innocent man, a friend of Sheila Burgess, deceased?

Chapter Ten

If Dr Milton was shocked by the film he did not show it, unless his very evident anger was a sign of outrage. He sat for several minutes quite still and silent, very pale, his mouth drawn in, his eyes blazing. Tim stood beside him, waiting for a rush of words that never came. All that did come from Dr Milton was a heavy sigh as he touched the buzzer on his desk and then spoke to his secretary in the next room.

"Get me Scotland Yard," he said. "Say you want the Vice Squad."

The secretary's gasp was clearly audible. Tim nodded, to save himself from laughing, but Dr Milton paid no attention to him. When the call came through he simply asked that someone should be sent immediately to his department to receive information relating to the death of a former patient, Miss Sheila Burgess.

"Yes," he repeated, "Sheila Burgess. No, I don't want the divisional C.I.D. My information almost certainly concerns your outfit. If you don't want to handle it, I shall go straight to M.I.5. I think it's for you, but it might conceivably be for them. It's international, anyway, I should think."

Tim looked at the radiologist with admiration and Dr Milton smiled.

"They bought that" he said. "I'll call you when they arrive. I expect you have work to do."

"Yes, sir."

At the door Tim paused.

"Would you really be able to get in touch with M.I.5, sir? Just like that? Or do you know someone?"

"Of course not. Neither. I haven't a clue. But it worked, which is what matters. And I don't expect they'll be disappointed when they see that spool. I'd like to open it myself but I think that might be a little rash."

Tim went up to the wards and was soon totally absorbed in his cases. The morning passed without any call for him from the X-ray Department. But going to lunch at one he met Dr Milton in

a ground-floor corridor.

"Oh, Long," he said. "Those chaps came and took the thing away. Only stayed five minutes. Collected Miss Burgess's notes, Miss Wheelan's name and home address, your name—I couldn't give them your address other than the hospital—and pushed off. There was no point in getting you down. They'd better play it their own way."

"Yes," said Tim. He felt deflated, but knew he had no right to be. It really was none of his business, except that it did concern Jane Wheelan closely and perhaps, in a small way, she had become his business. Or not? He thought of the very pleasant meal they had had together the evening before. She ought to know what had happened. He determined to find her after lunch and give her the news.

But when, after some trouble, he found her in the records room, looking out some files for Miss Gleaning, he learned that Dr Milton had already spoken to her.

"I suppose we had to give him the film," she said, unhappily. "For Sheila's sake I'd have liked to drop it in the incinerator straight off."

"That would have been very dangerous."

"Why?"

"Well, I gather Scotland Yard latched on to it with enthusiasm and took all our names and addresses."

She wrinkled up her face.

"They've done more than that. I have to go to Scotland Yard after I leave here today. To make a statement on something. As if I hadn't done that already."

"It was the local copper who came here after Sheila's body was found. The film is a very different cup of tea."

It certainly was. The detective-inspector who had gone to the West Kensington to see Dr Milton had on his return to the Yard gone straight to Detective-Superintendent Garrod.

"I think we've got a break at last," he said, producing the film and the spool. "Blue film, sequence of stills and in the spool blue micro-film of the same—er—incident, with a sound track, numerals, some kind of code, apparently."

"Where'd it come from?"

The inspector told him. Garrod looked grave.

"Better have the girl along, Bob," he said. "In the meantime

turn this over to the lab boys. They may have ideas. There must be more than meets the eye. You remember that charred bit of spool we got in that dump at Fulham?"

"The Indian student who took a load of dope and set his room on fire? He was charred, too, if I remember."

"Nasty case—yes. But the spool—you remember?"

"I do. It had a small length of micro-film stuck in the unburned end. I believe that was numerals, too. They never broke the cipher, did they?"

"No. Too little of it. But that Indian lad was connected for a time with the Bream lot. So this fine, unspoiled reel of filth may tie up quite a lot of loose ends. Get cracking, Bob."

The detective-inspector withdrew and Garrod got on the phone. He was quite excited. For months he had been knocking his head against a wall, flaking off a fragment here and there. Now at last a brick, a whole brick, had fallen into his hand, dropped there by an outside and entirely unforeseen agent. A girl of irreproachable standing and character. A girl—

He frowned as his call came through.

"John Marsden," the voice at the other end said quietly.

"Garrod here, sir. Can you come along? It's urgent."

"How urgent?"

"May I tell you when I see you?"

"Well, if it's like that—I've nothing special on my plate, but I'll check."

Twenty minutes later John Marsden, retired professor of oriental languages, sat opposite Superintendent Garrod, listening to the story of Sheila Burgess.

"So I think if you could manage to be here when the Wheelan girl comes in this evening—"

"I'd like to be. What about the lad who pulled Burgess out of the river?"

"Not together, do you think?"

"No. But this radiologist, Milton, is it? He seems to say that young Long brought the film to him after the girl developed it and it was Long who pointed out the unusual spool."

"That's right. But neither he nor Milton opened the spool so they don't know what was in it."

"I should think they've made a damned good guess."

"Perhaps. I'll have the boy along, too, then."

"It might be better," Marsden suggested, changing his mind, "not to have all the interested parties pouring into these well-known precincts together. Suppose I tackle Long myself? We need only warn him against unnecessary curiosity and unsolicited action."

"Most Press heroes get a thirst for further action," Garrod said, sourly.

"Only if they're unemployed or haven't enough to occupy their minds—or rather their imaginations. Long has a reasonably busy job, hasn't he?"

"*That's* an understatement if I know anything about hospitals," Garrod answered.

"So he'll only need a hint to keep him quiet, you mean?" Marsden asked. "Anyway, I'll take care of him. Your principal headache is the girl and this little cipher. May I have a copy to take away?"

Garrod agreed. It had been Bob's reference to the Indian student that had prompted him to call in Professor Marsden. The Foreign Office did so, too, when it was foxed over some difficult translation.

When the professor had gone, he went over again in his mind the chief points in Jane's connection with Sheila Burgess, as supplied by the divisional inspector. The man Stone was new to him. An eager character, by all accounts. No wonder a nice girl like Miss Wheelan was a bit put off by the wolf approach. Stone might have slipped up there. Found himself a bit out of his depth. Something quite unusual for him, probably. The girl might be useful. It depended on how she really stood in this business. No good counting on her for help, conscious, active help, that was. No right to. Far too risky.

He turned to other matters; those that had been interrupted by Dr Milton.

Jane approached Scotland Yard with feelings in which anxiety predominated. She still blamed herself for Sheila's death, because she had forgotten to give her back the film. In some way, she felt sure, this had brought about the fatal end.

So as soon as she was settled in a comfortable chair in Superintendent Garrod's office and found herself looking at two serious faces and two pairs of sympathetic eyes, she said, miserably, "I wish Sheila hadn't come to our hospital at all. I

wanted to help her but I seem to have done the exact opposite. I feel—guilty—"

She could not go on. She was ashamed of the note of self-pity in her voice. It was poor Sheila she had come about, not her own feelings.

"Don't worry, Miss Wheelan," Garrod said, getting over his astonishment at hearing words very seldom spoken in his room. "You did your best for her. She was too big a problem for you to tackle, you know."

"I suppose so. But I needn't have forgotten to give her back her film. I needn't have dropped it on the floor of her room to begin with."

"It was extremely lucky for the police you did both these things," Professor Marsden said. "The way it looks now you may have set in motion something quite big."

"How d'you mean?"

He did not answer. He let the sense of importance settle into her. It was necessary for the job in hand and supremely desirable for her own safety.

"You see," Garrod went on, picking up the thread the professor had dropped, "we are quite sure there is more behind this than the ordinary sort of pornography. It might make it possible for us to break up a vice ring that's been a problem for a long time."

"You mean there really *was* something in the spool?"

The two men exchanged glances. The young registrar had pointed out the spool's peculiarities to Dr Milton, they knew. They had not realised the girl was in on this as well.

Jane noticed their exchange and said, "Tim and I developed the film together. We both noticed the spool had no split in it and could have something inside, if it was hollow."

"So you do realise the importance of this, both to us and to *them*?"

"Oh yes. Gerry—Mr Stone—keeps trying to see me. Yesterday he called three times. The girl I share my flat with saw him once. She didn't like the look of him. Besides, I'd told her the party I went to with him was a flop as far as I was concerned. Nearly everyone was high and silly with it. A good many weird characters. One in particular—"

"Go on."

She told them about the self-styled artist's concern for Sheila.

"He was scared on her account. Genuinely. He came up to the hospital in the afternoon on the day she was killed. I think he'd seen the early editions of the evening papers. They had the story of her fall from the train but not her name. I've checked that since. He wanted to know if she was still in the hospital and when I said she'd gone he said, 'Oh *God*!' like that and went away. I saw it myself in the late edition after I went home."

"Can you give me this young man's name?" Marsden asked.

"Sorry. I never heard it."

"He hasn't tried to get in touch since?"

"No."

There was a little pause, another exchange of glances. Jane began to feel impatient. She saw no point in grinding over the few facts she could give them. She was tired and sad but she no longer felt responsible. These two clever competent individuals had taken over, thank God. Sheila was no longer a problem, only an unhappy memory.

"Miss Wheelan," said Superintendent Garrod, gravely, breaking into these melancholy thoughts, "now that you understand the great importance of what has happened, we must ask you to help us still further."

"*Me*?" said Jane astonished.

"Yes. This man Stone wants to see you, urgently. Probably he and his crowd are after the film. Probably that was what they wanted from Sheila on the train."

"Oh, *no*!"

Jane's horrified exclamation put Garrod off his careful approach. Professor Marsden said, consolingly, "Now, Miss Wheelan, you mustn't start blaming yourself all over again. There's no evidence at all that Burgess was attacked on the train."

"She opened the carriage door herself," Garrod took up the tale. "Her prints were on the handle and on the surface of the door. She seems to have stood there for a time, making up her mind to go out. The inquest will certainly bring in a verdict of suicide and I wouldn't be prepared to dispute it, but for a few more facts that came up."

"What did you find? Please, please, tell me. I won't repeat any of it."

"I'm prepared to trust you for that. Well, then, her suitcases had both been gone through and re-packed. In a hurry, too. They were not locked. We think we know who did this. He's left London in a hurry."

Jane said, dully, "She lost her keys in the river with her handbag."

"We know that," Garrod agreed. "The carriage luckily was not entered when the train went on from Reading and when the news of the body being found was sent down the line the guard was able to identify her luggage, left on the rack, and lock the carriage door. He was also able to describe fairly fully eight people who were sitting in that carriage when he collected or punched their tickets. They had all travelled from London. Six of them got out at Reading, two went on to Exeter, but went to the dining car and stayed there. The point is they were all sitting in that carriage a few minutes after the time the girl must have fallen from the train, yet not one of them had reported it, far less tried to prevent her going, or stopped the train when it happened."

"But they *can't* have been in the carriage!"

"Perhaps not. Incidentally, the emergency cord had been cut."

Jane was both horrified and indignant.

"Can't you trace them? Don't other people on the train know where they were at the time? I mean, if they weren't in the carriage."

"That would call for a broadcast," Marsden said. "At present the police don't want to show all that degree of interest. Isn't that so, Garrod?"

The superintendent nodded.

"I see," Jane said. "How horrible!"

"Going back," Garrod said, "the point is, Burgess did not have the film. Stone, Bream and the rest want it and they seem to think it may be with you."

"I see," said Jane again. She was beginning to see all too clearly. "Perhaps Gerry went to Sheila's digs, that afternoon I was there packing, on purpose to get the film. It fell out of her jewel box, you know. Trinket box would be a better name for it. She only had a few cheap brooches and some long strings of beads, poor thing. I don't suppose they paid her very much. Anyway it did fall out of that box, I think. I found it on the floor

when I went up the last time to check I hadn't left anything she needed."

"Very likely it did."

"Yes, now I do remember he made quite a thing over helping me. Wanted to take the suitcases to Paddington for me. But I knew Sheila wanted *me* to take the big one. She didn't want anyone to know she was going from Paddington. After Gerry said he knew she lived at Reading I thought she'd prefer to have her cases at the hospital."

"Can you think of anything else in connection with the film?"

"Why, yes, of course!" Jane was getting quite excited. "The night of the party I had a film of my own in the handbag I took with me. Sheila's film was in my everyday coat pocket. I do a lot of private photography," she explained. "I often have the odd film, new ones or those I'm going to develop, in any of my handbags or pockets."

"So what about this film you took to the party?"

"It disappeared."

Garrod and Professor Marsden straightened in their chairs. Now was the right moment.

"Stone snitched it, then," the professor said. "Sauce, don't you think?"

"*Bloody* sauce," Jane agreed.

They laughed.

"That's the girl," said Marsden. "Now isn't it obvious Stone still thinks you've got the film? Since he goes on trying to contact you?"

"Why doesn't he ring up and ask straight out?"

"Far too cagey. He must know the Law is interested in Sheila's death, even if he doesn't suspect they're on to his game, too. No, I think he'll keep on trying to see you. What I suggest and I'm sure it's what Superintendent Garrod wants is that you let him."

"See Gerry again? But—but—knowing what you've told me—"

"Exactly. It won't be easy for you. In fact it might be a bit dangerous. But you're not entirely safe as it is. I don't want to frighten you unnecessarily, but it occurs to me they might even kidnap you as things are."

"And that's the most frightening thing you could possibly suggest," said Jane, jumping up as if she wanted to bolt on the spot.

“Now, now,” Garrod put in. “Don’t listen to him. He’s just playing the cloak and dagger card because he has no responsibility in this.”

“Aren’t you a policeman?” Jane asked.

Marsden laughed.

“Far from it. I used to teach oriental languages. I was ill and retired. Now I help anyone who wants to consult me on almost any language east of Suez. I can always help them, you know.”

Jane turned to Garrod.

“What *did* you actually find in the spool?” she asked.

“I can’t tell you that,” he said. “But I guarantee that you will have an unseen escort wherever you go at present, if you agree to meet this man Stone openly when next he tries to get in touch with you.”

“And if I won’t?”

“It could be immensely valuable,” Marsden said. “Lead the superintendent where he wants to go. Will you play, Miss Wheelan?”

“I don’t think much of it as a game,” she answered, soberly. “The man called Giles, who was at the party, gave me goose pimples. Why can’t you just run in the whole bunch now, if you know who they are and what they do? Isn’t the film good enough for that?”

“As pornography, yes,” said Garrod. “Good for a heavy fine, possibly a shortish prison sentence. We could certainly mop up the Bream outfit straight away. It wouldn’t be his first conviction. It’s the other angle that’s all-important. You’d be well advised to do what Professor Marsden suggests. Otherwise I think we should have to ask you to get sick leave from the hospital for a couple of months.”

“Get *what*?”

“Without an escort we couldn’t be held responsible for your safety. Even at your own home there would be a certain risk. These people are willing to take very big risks.”

“How long will it go on?” Jane asked, beginning to relent, even to become a little excited. After all, it would be better to experience danger here in London, with the Law behind her, than at home in a country vicarage.

“I can’t imagine what my father would think,” she exclaimed. “He’s a parson.”

“No one you know, not even your parents, must hear any of this at all,” Garrod said, severely.

“No one at all? Not Mary—the girl I live with? Not Tim? He knows rather more than me already.”

“Not even Dr Long. If any of them knew you were coming here you can say you’ve been and made a statement. Nothing else.”

She sat trying to make up her mind, but failed. In the end she got up, still undecided.

“I don’t know what to say,” she told them, honestly. “If Gerry tries to see me, I’ll have to make up my mind, won’t I? But he may not. Then I needn’t.”

“All right,” Garrod told her. “You think it over. Mind you, I don’t believe they’ll give up till they know for certain where the film is. If you do contact Stone, of course you’ll say you know nothing whatever about it.”

“I don’t think he’d believe me,” Jane answered, but she agreed to keep the secret at all times.

The flat was in darkness when she got back. She remembered that Mary had a date for that evening. Having switched on the lights and the fire in the sitting-room she went into her bedroom and put on the light there. She knew at once, in the dark, by the lingering smell of tobacco, that someone had been there. Neither she nor Mary smoked; there had been no unauthorised visitors that day.

Very quickly she opened various drawers where she kept her photographic equipment and stores. As she feared, here was the meaning of the raid. Every film she had, unused, waiting for development, developed and cut and stored in packets, was gone. The treasures collected for over a year had disappeared.

She was at once furiously angry. Dashing out of the flat, leaving the front door open, she clattered down to the ground floor where the owner of the whole house lived. She rang the bell violently.

Mild Mrs Stephens opened her door.

“I’ve been burgled!” Jane said, wildly. “Did anyone call today when we were out?”

“Burgled? What d’ you mean?”

“Did Mary let anyone in? Did you?”

“No. No, of course not. Nobody’s been today except the

window cleaners. I must say I wasn't expecting them so soon after the last time."

"*Window cleaners*?"

Jane was off up the stairs, slamming her own front door, running to the telephone, before Mrs Stephens, totally bewildered, had retreated into her own flat.

While she waited for Superintendent Garrod to arrive, with the fingerprint expert he proposed to bring with him, Jane moved restlessly about the flat, afraid to touch anything lest she should spoil some trace of the invaders. On her second visit to the hall she saw in the letter box a white envelope, which had certainly not been there before. She snatched it out. Inside there was a brief note that read, 'Urgent. Ring me tonight,' followed by a London telephone number. It was unsigned.

Jane pulled open the door of the flat. As she did so the outer front door below clicked shut. She raced back to the sitting-room. A dark figure was outside the gate; a pale blob of a face looked up at her and turned immediately away, unrecognised, unrecognisable.

With the note in her hand Jane went once more to the telephone. She dialled the exchange and numbers on the paper and waited. The bell rang at the other end but no one answered it.

Chapter Eleven

At Garrod's suggestion Jane rang the number on the note again after an hour. This time a voice answered the call, the same urgent, rough voice she had heard in the passage of Tom's flat after the party.

"Who are you?" Jane demanded.

"Never mind that. I must see you."

"Why didn't you wait when you left the card. I was in. I think I saw you in the road."

"You don't live alone, do you? I must see you alone."

"Why? What's all this in aid of?"

There was a pause. Jane thought she heard heavy breathing at the other end.

"It's about—Sheila."

"*What* about her? You said this before at the party, didn't you? You *are* the same person, aren't you? And at the hospital main door?"

"Yes, I am. When can I see you and where?"

"Look," said Jane firmly. "I'm not going to have you coming to my flat unless Mary is there too. The only other place I'll see you is the hospital. With so many people about all the time a conversation between a patient and a member of the staff is about the most private you can find and it can be held in public, too. No one listens; they're all much too set on their own troubles."

Again there was a pause. Jane saw that Garrod was now standing just behind her, listening to her end of the call. She put her hand over the mouthpiece and said, softly, "It *is* that student or artist or whatever. The scruffy one at the party."

"Are you there?" the harsh voice began again.

"Of course. Waiting for you."

"Sorry. I was thinking."

"Perhaps you'd make up your mind. This call is ticking up, rather."

"Sorry," the voice said again and then, in a rush, "O.K. At the hospital."

“At midday tomorrow. Twelve, noon, at the Out Patient Staff canteen. No, you won’t want to ask for that. Come to the Radiography Department and sit on one of the benches for waiting patients. If a nurse or anyone asks you what you’re there for, just say Miss Wheelan told you to wait for her. Got that?”

“Yes. Twelve tomorrow morning outside your department. To wait for Miss Wheelan. I’ll be there. ’ Bye.”

“Wait!” Jane cried. “You still haven’t told me your name!”

But he had rung off; her receiver was already buzzing gently. She put it down and turned to Superintendent Garrod.

“He wants to see me urgently. I’ve arranged to meet him—”

“At noon tomorrow outside the Radiography Department. Yes.”

“It wasn’t Gerry—I mean, Mr Stone.”

“I’m aware of that. Has Stone been on to you today at all?”

“No.” Jane’s eyes lit up in anger again. “Too busy ruining my poor films, I expect,” she said. “Or rather his beastly friends, I suppose.”

The superintendent nodded.

“I’m afraid we’ve nothing to go on here,” he said. “If it was a set of bogus window cleaners who got in through your window and swiped the films, they were professionals and wore gloves. On the other hand there were some prints outside the windows. Difficult to say whether they are old or recent. We haven’t had much rain lately, have we?”

“Mostly fog,” Jane said, dispiritedly.

“I suppose,” Garrod began again, “none of that bunch could have got hold of your keys at any time? I don’t mean stolen them. Just had an opportunity to handle them.”

Jane exclaimed angrily.

“I must be getting senile!” she cried. “Gerry took my coat and bag at the party when we got there. He took them away—”

Garrod was reproachful.

“You told me you missed a film out of the bag. You didn’t say you’d given up the bag for the whole evening.”

“We weren’t there the whole evening,” Jane said, crossly. “I generally leave my bag with my coat, unless it’s a proper evening bag. I don’t take a lot of money to parties. Sometimes almost none if someone is driving me there. Anyway I wouldn’t have imagined at the start of that particular party that anyone

would want to take an impression of my door keys."

"More than one key?"

"The main door and the flat."

"I see."

There was a pause. The superintendent was looking thoughtful.

"So one or more of that lot may have got in simply by opening the door," he said, slowly. "Another little headache for us, Miss Wheelan."

"What about *me*?" she said, indignantly. "It's not a very encouraging thought that they can come in here any time they feel like it."

"It is not. I said the other day we might have to suggest you take a bit of sick leave or part of your holiday. I'm not sure I oughtn't to press it now."

"Don't you dare!" said Jane. "You asked me to see Gerry Stone again and that's what I'm going to do, when he condescends to reappear."

Garrod did not press his suggestion. But he determined to brief his subordinates more fully about their watch on the house in Arcadia Road. It seemed to him to be extremely likely that Gerry had arranged to take an impression of Jane's keys while she was parted from her handbag. He had visited the flat. He knew its geography. With a key to let himself in he could go over her room and leave again without being noticed by anyone. Especially by anyone who did not know he was not one of the tenants.

When the superintendent had gone, Jane rang up the hospital to give Tim the latest news. He was interested, excited, indignant as she told her story. At the end she said, "I've been thinking. If Gerry is so keen on finding this film and hasn't, of course, found it here, he may decide Sheila had it on her, after all. In which case he may expect the police have it, don't you think?"

"Yes. But the police haven't moved yet—in any direction—so he may wonder if Sheila had it so well hidden they didn't find it. In which case—"

"Her parents might have got it!"

"That was what I was about to say—"

"Sorry. D'you know, I think I ought to go and see them."

"At Reading?"

"Yes. The address was in one of the papers, wasn't it?"

"I've got it."

"I'm free tomorrow afternoon. I think I'll go down. It would be a help to them, perhaps, to hear about her stay in hospital and what we tried to do for her and why she left."

There was a little pause, then Tim said, "Don't ring off. I'm looking at my diary. Yes. I've nothing on tomorrow afternoon, either. I'll run you down."

"Mightn't you be wanted?"

"Oh, balls to that! I'm not a slave, even if the powers that be like to think I am. The others can cope. They could even get Beech-Thomas to do some unprepared work for once."

"If you say so. I'd love to be driven down."

"Right. Two o' clock outside the old Path Lab. No need to advertise."

Jane laughed as she hung up. Tim was sweet. Very cautious, very practical. Did he really want to see the Burgess parents? Or did he want to have her as a companion for the afternoon? Or—and the thought sent a little shiver of fear through her—did he dislike the idea of her travelling to Reading alone by train? As Sheila had done.

At twelve o' clock exactly the next morning Jane left the department and moved towards the benches along the corridor. A few figures sat there, waiting. They straightened up hopefully when they saw her, but getting no response from her subsided, muttering to one another their various dissatisfactions.

Jane moved slowly to the end of the row, then walked over to the general out-patients' waiting hall. There was no scruffy figure anywhere. Shabby ones in plenty, but their well-worn clothes had been brushed for this occasion, their faces were clean, however worn by anxiety and disease. She looked in vain for the tangled hair, the fuzzy beard, the filthy sweater. The young man had not kept his appointment.

Though her impatience grew as the minutes passed, Jane waited a full hour. Then, remembering that Tim wanted to leave at two, she went away to have her lunch.

She ate quickly, wondering all the time why the young man had not kept his appointment. Was it an artist's inability to move by the clock? Or had he been prevented from coming by

other people, importunate friends, perhaps? Or perhaps forcibly held back? In which case it would be a mistake to ring him up, as she was half inclined to do.

In the end she took no action about him. He had asked to see her and had not appeared. That was the end of it. But her thoughts went back to her own activities and they had not left her when she joined Tim on the rough neglected path beside the disused former Path Lab, and he found her subdued, less than responsive to his warm greeting, and silent when she took her place beside him.

But as he drove off towards the west she settled back in her seat, relaxed with a sigh and said, happily, "You're doing a very good deed driving me down, I was really quite a bit scared of going by train."

He glanced round at her quickly.

"I wasn't thinking of thugs when I suggested it," he said. "I was thinking of coppers."

"Oh. Yes, of course. They're supposed to be keeping an eye on me. But only if I meet Gerry, and he hasn't uttered since the day before yesterday."

"I didn't mean that, quite, either. I was thinking of what Garrod said about not interfering."

"*Interfering*? Oh, I see what you mean. But surely going down to see the Burgesses to say how sorry we are and all that isn't interfering with police action?"

"It could be. It all depends on what they tell us. And what we tell them, doesn't it?"

His honesty was infectious. Jane agreed. They decided that they didn't care what the police thought of their action and that they would find out as much as possible about Sheila's life during the last few years.

But in this they were disappointed. The Burgess parents were surprised, gratified and touched by the visit. Mrs Burgess, after a few formal exchanges, mastered her growing emotion sufficiently to ask Jane to go upstairs with her.

"Father would like to hear the medical side from Dr Long," she said. "I don't think I could stand it again. Not after the inquest."

'That must have been terrible for you," said Jane, following her out of the room.

Mrs Burgess led the way upstairs. The house was one of the extensive Edwardian suburban development on the Wokingham side of the town. It was small but not quite as box-like as its successors of the twenties and thirties, nor so well planned as the really modern homes of the late forties and fifties. Mr Burgess was a clerk in an insurance office. One of the many conscientious white collar workers whose salary had not risen over the years at the pace dictated by the big unions for their members' wages. Great care, Jane thought, was needed in this house to keep up the standard below which Mrs Burgess refused to fall. It was evident in the carefully darned curtains at the staircase window and the neatly patched cover of the bed in Sheila's room.

Mrs Burgess moved to the mantelpiece and there turned to face her.

"Sheila wasn't happy at home," she said. "We were too quiet for her. She was an only child, you understand. My little boy died before she was born."

"I'm sorry," Jane said. She shrank from hearing any more. At the hospital she had come across so many tragedies of precisely this kind. The small, far too small, family of the highly respectable, obsessively careful office worker; parents reasonably healthy, but not over-robust; perhaps the grandchildren of the industrial revolution, suffering still from a legacy of that over-crowded and under-fed generation. These Burgesses looked elderly, perhaps they had married late. And so, of their two children, the boy had died in childhood and the girl had—

"Sheila would go to London," Mrs Burgess was continuing. "That was where you first knew her, wasn't it, Miss Wheelan?"

"Yes. At our preliminary training course."

"She could have worked in the hospital here," Mrs Burgess went on. "They're always short of staff. I know the money isn't much, but living at home would have made it up to what she got at that Bream's, having to pay for her room and her food and everything."

"I'm sure it would," Jane agreed. "Living in London is terribly expensive."

"It's no wonder she got in with the wrong lot," Mrs Burgess said. "We only saw him once—before—before the accident, that

is. But once was enough. Father agreed with me."

"Who was that?" Jane asked.

"Why, Mr Stone, of course," Sheila's mother said, looking very straight at Jane. "Only I mustn't say anything, must I, seeing he's a friend of yours?"

"Did he tell you that?"

"How else would I know? He was here the day after it happened, asking a lot of questions. Very upset he seemed, I must say. But I don't trust that sort. Too friendly by half."

"He is *not* a friend of mine," Jane said, "and I entirely agree with you."

She told Mrs Burgess about her first meeting with Gerry and about his subsequent behaviour. She did not describe the party in Tom's studio.

"He even had the nerve to ask for some small trinket of hers as a memento," Mrs Burgess said, indignantly. "I had to tell him the police had all her things, suitcases and all. They only sent them back to me today."

She pointed at the bed where Jane had already noticed a pile of clothes and then, opening a drawer, took out a box that Jane recognised and from it drew a string of white beads.

"These were round her neck when they found her," she said. "Now I've seen you and heard your opinion of Mr Stone and know what you tried to do for Sheila I'd like to give you these. I couldn't bear to keep them. We've decided to offer the clothes to the Red Cross. After all she did and taking her own life, too, we don't feel we want to be reminded—"

"All *she* did?" Jane said, astonished at the bitterness and even hatred in the woman's voice. Then she understood.

"You mean those art photographs, don't you?"

Mrs Burgess made a noise expressing both contempt and disgust.

"Art doesn't have to be filth," she said. "To my mind you can have art without the—er—the altogether—"

"So you can," said Jane, stung into argument. "But the nude can be an object of art, too. All the greatest painters in the world, and sculptors, have used naked figures in their works."

She checked herself, knowing she could never alter the Burgesses' views on this matter. No wonder Sheila had refused to live at home. This house and these people explained nearly

everything.

"That may be so," Mrs Burgess answered. "I don't care much for pictures myself, nor figures in stone, either."

She drew the chain of white beads through her fingers, then held it out to Jane.

"I'd like you to have them, Miss Wheelan," she repeated. "I only wish she'd met up with you again sooner than she did. She needed a nice friend and she never found one, poor child."

So she was a nice friend, was she, Jane wondered, following Mrs Burgess soberly down the stairs again. In spite of their difference of opinion. Perhaps almost because of it. The intricacies, the more delicate shades of snobbery were beyond her.

Mr Burgess and Tim were discussing rugby football over a glass of beer. They had clearly found Sheila a topic of limited interest.

Mrs Burgess, slightly flustered, found Jane and herself a cup of tea and as soon as the various beverages were drunk Jane said they had a long way to go and had better start back at once.

"You were a hell of a time upstairs," Tim said, after a silence that lasted until they were clear of the town. "Was Ma Burgess upset or something?"

"No. I think they've got over the shock."

"He has, certainly."

"I think they've disapproved of Sheila for too long to feel great sorrow for her now. She obviously hated her home."

"Can you blame her?"

"Not really. All loving care and no real affection or understanding. Mrs Burgess gave me these."

She pulled the beads out of her bag. Tim glanced down at them.

"What are they?"

"Sheila's. She was wearing them in the train. They hadn't fallen off because she had them inside her jumper, Mrs Burgess said."

"How odd. Or do girls often wear decorative necklaces out of sight."

"Rather odd. If they were pearls, real ones, I might wear them like that for safety in travelling. Not ordinary white poppets."

"White what?"

She broke the string of beads to show him how each head fitted into its neighbour.

"Useful, because you can have them any length you want," she explained. "Have you really never seen poppets before?"

"Not consciously."

Tim said no more about them until, much later in the day, after dining with Jane, he dropped her at the door of the flats. Then he said, quite suddenly, "About those beads. I remember now Sheila had white beads on in bed. When I was taking that plaster off—"

"They got in the way, you mean?"

"By no means. They were up round her neck. Quite a short strip of them. Not a ruddy great chain like you have there."

"I told you. That's the whole point of poppets," Jane said.

She pulled the chain out of her bag, demonstrated their mechanism once more and poured them back again. Then thanking Tim for a lovely afternoon and evening she turned away towards the front door.

He did not follow her. But after he had got back into the car he waited for a few minutes before driving away. He wanted to see the lights go on in the flat and know that she was safely home. Also he had remembered something more about Sheila's beads. It puzzled him, but he would have to wait until the morning, he knew, before he could set his mind at rest.

Chapter Twelve

The second patient to be ushered into the X-ray Department the next morning by the nurse in charge of the waiting hall was Gerald Stone.

Jane was walking across the reception room of the department, on her way to take orders from Miss Gleaning when he came in. She stopped dead when she saw him, her heart racing.

Gerry grinned at her, swung out his left arm, which was in a sling and said, “Tripped myself up. It’s my wrist.”

Miss Gleaning, who had been directing the first patient to the cubicles, turned her head.

“Tell Susan I’ll use the number one room for that man. What’s this? Query Colles, query scaphoid? They don’t seem to have got very far. Take a straight film and get it done at once. They’ll want him back in Casualty.”

“Yes, Miss Gleaning.”

The shock of his arrival had passed. Jane said, coldly, “Will you leave your coat and jacket in the second cubicle, please, and come back here.”

“I don’t think I can manage,” he said, gently. “Won’t you—?”

“Nurse will help you,” Jane said, moving away to give Miss Gleaning’s message to Susan in the next room.

When she went back into the reception room she found Gerry sitting in a chair against the wall. The nurse had gone back to the waiting hall.

“Come this way, please,” Jane said. He got up and followed her meekly.

She settled him on the table, took his arm gently from the sling, rolling up his shirt sleeve above the elbow. She saw that the wrist was slightly swollen, but there was no displacement of the bones, no marked bruising. He made rather too much fuss over the way she moved his arm to place it in the right position for the picture.

“How did you do it?” she asked, presently.

“Tripped on some steps. Put my hand out to save myself.

Ouch! Have a heart!"

"Sorry."

She stepped back, swung the apparatus into position, arranged the correct exposure. Another girl came into the room.

"Miss Gleaning said she'd like me to see this."

"Yes, Audrey."

Had Miss Gleaning noticed the recognition? Probably. And had sent Audrey to put a stop to any unprofessional exchanges. The Gleaning could not know how grateful she was, Jane thought, laughing inwardly.

She instructed her junior carefully, took pictures in two positions, and removing the exposed films, went to the door.

"Will you take this patient back to his cubicle, please, Audrey," she said. "He will need help with his jacket. I shouldn't bother about his overcoat. He'll have to go back to Casualty when we've got the result."

She went briskly across reception to the entrance of the dark room. As she moved along the passage she heard Miss Gleaning say, "Audrey!" and a second later Gerry's voice.

"I can manage. Honestly. I'll just sling it round me."

Jane got to work. The bones came up clear, sharp-edged. She was holding the two films on their frames, trying to identify the small wrist bones, when she heard a movement behind her and swung round. Gerry stood there.

"You can't come in here!" she said, tensely. She was very angry.

"Why not? It's my wrist, isn't it?" He moved closer, holding out his good hand.

"Patients are not allowed—"

"Oh, come off it! Listen. I must see you, Jane. There are things I must say to you. I've tried to get in touch. You were always out."

"Not my fault. You didn't leave any proper message or anything."

"I know. I can explain that. Look, when can I see you? Quick! Tell me!"

She had to get rid of him. Apart from anything else he was holding up the work. She ought to be taking the next case.

"All right," she said. "I haven't got my diary here so it may be no good, but the day after tomorrow, evening, about six?"

"That'll be fine. I'll call for you."

"Give me your phone number. In case I can't make it."

He hesitated. But before he could answer, Miss Gleaning's voice, raised, was calling for Jane and a few seconds later she appeared in the dark room in person.

"Well!" she said, standing very stiffly in the doorway.

"This patient wanted to see the film—" Jane began.

"Have I done wrong?" Gerry asked. His voice was polite, confident, unrepentant, disarming. Miss Gleaning drew a deep breath.

"You must know perfectly well we can't have patients interfering with the work," she said, more mildly than Jane would have thought possible. "Come with me, please."

She stood aside for Gerry to pass out in front of her. Turning to Jane she said, "Let me see."

She took the two frames, held them up, stared at them intently. "I should say a totally negative result," she said in a low voice. "Wouldn't you?"

Jane nodded.

"I'll send him back with a note suggesting a possible scaphoid. They'll put him in plaster. Serve him right. Impudence."

She was gone and Jane, after another look at the negatives, hung them up to dry. You couldn't really tell in the dark room if there was any bone injury or not. Dr Milton, viewing them properly, would have to give his opinion. Poor old Gerry. He hadn't won out on this, thanks to Miss Gleaning. Serve him right, as she'd said. But he certainly had damaged his wrist slightly. She wondered how this had really come about.

At the end of the morning she went to Casualty to see if they had reacted as Miss Gleaning hoped. Just as she expected G. Stone's wrist had been enclosed in a plaster and an appointment had been made for him to attend the orthopaedic surgeon's out-patient clinic in two days' time.

Two days from now. Her date with Gerry was on the same evening. She went on to find her lunch, thoughtful, not a little afraid.

But before this, in the middle of the morning, Miss Gleaning had sent her up to Alexandra Ward about a requisition form that had come down unsigned. Jane saw that Sister was busy at the end of the ward with one of the senior consultant physicians and

his houseman. Presently, as she waited outside, occasionally taking a look through the glass upper panels of the double door, she saw the houseman move from the group at the bedside and walk briskly down the ward.

As he passed through the door, Jane accosted him.

"Do you mind? This form—it isn't signed. Miss Gleaning sent me up—"

The young man turned the paper in her hand without taking it from her.

"Not me," he said. "Not one of my beds. Try Ferguson. Or Sister will tell you."

He was gone, leaving Jane to shower curses impartially on all staff, both nursing and medical.

But the consultant's round had come to an end. He and Sister were pacing solemnly back down the ward, looking neither to right nor left, ignoring patients who smiled and waved and those others who leaned forward, half out of their beds, hoping to ask the question they had wanted to put since the last visit, but had had no chance to utter while the technical words flew backwards and forwards between the doctor and Sister over their prostrate, uncovered bodies. The consultant now deliberately ignored all overtures. He had already spoken briefly to all his patients in the ward, confirmed their treatment, or revised it; encouraged them by assurance of progress or exhorted them to have patience. Until he was quite out of their hearing he would not give his views or his orders to Sister.

Jane knew this. She stood back as the pair left the ward.

"Just carry on, Sister," the consultant said, hardly pausing in his stride. "Mrs Winthrop's going downhill fast, isn't she?"

"Yes, sir. Her daughter knows. She comes up very regularly. She and her husband will be glad when it's over. They had her like this, in their own home, off and on, for five years."

"Good for them. You can tell them there won't be any 'off' this time. I give her a week, at most."

"Yes, sir."

Sister gave Mrs Winthrop forty-eight hours. She had watched her face during this last examination. Her expression confirmed the outlook, which was without hope. She had not been deceived by the physician's bland manner. So now she would stop fighting; she would allow herself the peace of acceptance.

“That wretched young neurotic next door upset her a lot, didn’t she? While she was in.”

“Miss Burgess? Yes. I think she did. She was a very disturbing factor in the ward all the time she was in. Even if it was only a few days.”

“Oh, well.”

The consultant had reached the main corridor. These last words were spoken absent-mindedly, for his thoughts were already with the male patients he was about to see in the next ward he would visit. He looked up and down the corridor.

“Oh, there you are. Did you find it?”

Jane saw the houseman’s young face, red from his rapid sprint to and from the Path Lab, appear beside his boss, smiling success.

“Good. Let’s get on, then.”

Sister had seen Jane, standing respectfully against the wall. As soon as the other two had gone she turned to her, holding out her hand. Jane did not have to explain.

“They don’t seem able to keep their minds on what they’re supposed to be doing,” Sister grumbled. “I have all the forms laid out on my desk, names filled in, requests, even. And they can’t make enough effort to add their own names to them.”

“It’s Miss Dennison again,” Jane said. “If you could sign it yourself, please, Sister, ‘p.p.’ whoever it ought to be—”

“Miss Gleaning won’t mind and Dr Milton will never know? Very well. Come into my room. I hope you haven’t been waiting long.”

Jane followed her, a little surprised by the cordial tone of Sister’s voice. She had not been to the ward since the day of Sheila’s death. She was afraid Sister would connect her permanently with that unfortunate girl.

Perhaps she did. But not with any animosity.

“Did you have to give evidence at the inquest?” Sister asked, handing back the completed form.

“Sheila, d’you mean? No, thank heaven.”

They looked at one another for a long moment. Then Jane said, quietly, “Mr Long and I went to Reading yesterday afternoon to see her mother and father. They’re very respectable, very puritanical, terribly strict with her, I think. They’d lost a little boy.”

"Typical," said Sister and sighed.

"Mrs Burgess gave me some beads of Sheila's. A long chain of white heads."

"*Beads*?" said Sister and stopped.

"Yes. I was going to ask you sometime. Show them to you. Mr Long thinks she wore them in the ward."

"A short string round her neck, almost a choker."

"If you doubled them, yes, it would make a choker."

"Single," said Sister, with emphasis.

Jane stared, then shrugged.

"Oh well, they're poppets. You can do anything you like with them, can't you? Break them or join them any length. Mrs Burgess said she must have been wearing them when she was killed because they came back to her with the clothes after the police had seen them. They kept the suitcases. The police, I mean."

"Sheila wasn't wearing beads—or any kind of jewellery—when she left this ward," said Sister.

Jane suddenly remembered the paper in her hand.

"I must fly," she said. "I've been ages too long already. May I show you the beads? I'd like to know if you saw them ever?"

She ran all the way back to the department. Miss Gleaning had been very busy while she was away and had not noticed the passage of time. Jane slipped back into the routine.

During her lunch hour she went away to the flat to get the beads, banging them round her neck inside her polo-necked jumper as Sheila had worn them in the train. At the end of the afternoon she went up to Alexandra Ward to show them to Sister.

"Just a minute," Sister said. She went into the ward kitchen where one of the nurses was making tea in a very large teapot.

"Nurse Kimmins," said Sister, formally, "you know Miss Wheelan from X-ray, don't you?"

The nurse, a dark girl with an olive skin and blue-black hair, turned and smiled.

"Tell Miss Wheelan about Sheila Burgess," Sister went on. "What you told me and what you thought."

"Well, I was seeing to her a good deal, you know, and I was struck by her changes of mood. She'd be up and down half a dozen times a day. I know she was a query nut case, but—"

“She was perfectly sane,” Jane said, steadily. “She was frightened, that was all.”

“It depends if you’re frightened of something real or not, doesn’t it? I mean, if it’s imaginary then it’s neurotic and that’s —”

“Still not insanity. But I agree with you about her moods,” Jane said. “Absolutely. I never knew if I should find her excited and cheerful or down in the dumps, crying her eyes out.”

“That’s agreed between you, then,” said Sister firmly. “Now let’s go back to my room, Miss Wheelan—”

“But the beads—”

“Pardon?” said the nurse.

“Back to my room,” repeated Sister. Jane obeyed.

When she had shut the door Sister said, “I don’t want that girl connecting the beads with Sheila’s behaviour. You see now what I’m driving at?”

Jane did see. Sheila’s anxiety over her possessions. Her constant wish to go back to her lodging. Her insistence upon having her suitcases in the ward. Her wearing these beads.

She put her hand inside her jumper, pulled up the string again and breaking it at one bead, laid it out in a straight line on Sister’s table.

“You mean there might be a pep drug or something in them,” she said.

Sister opened a drawer and took out a pair of pliers.

“My only tool, but good for nearly everything,” she said.

She detached a single bead, put it between the jaws of the pliers and pressed them together. The bead cracked with a very faint noise. Opening the pliers, two small fragments of a tiny hollow case and a small heap of white powder fell to the table.

“The powder may be the crushed part of the bead,” said Jane. “*Are* poppets hollow?”

“I wouldn’t know,” Sister said, looking for a duster in another drawer. “Make what you like of it. I think there’s quite a strong possibility Sheila took drugs. That’s all.”

“So do I, now.” Jane answered. She was remembering the landlady, Mrs Coates, who had hinted at it in her bitter, resentful voice.

She swept up the beads, fastened them round her neck again and thanking Sister for her help, went thoughtfully home to the

flat.

Chapter Thirteen

Back in the flat Jane found Mary in the kitchen, ironing. This peaceful and prosaic scene, coming at the end of a working day so full of unusual, even fantastic happenings, made her laugh.

"What's so funny?" Mary asked. The shirt she was ironing was an old one, but did not seem to her to be a worthy object of derision.

"He's turned up again," Jane said. "Guess where?"

"Who's turned up?" Mary asked, defensively, then, her mind waking up, said, "Not that doubtful charmer—Barry—"

"Gerry," answered Jane. "Gerald Stone."

"Lying in wait for you outside the gates? Chasing you up the road?"

"Neither. As a patient in the department."

"*No*!"

"Yes, indeed. A genuine sprain of his left wrist. All puffed up and painful. Limited movement. But no fracture."

"So he wasn't putting it on, but using it as an excuse to see you?"

"Apparently. He overreached himself though. He didn't know the Gleaning."

Jane told her friend the full story of that morning's activities, including their outcome.

"Are you really going out with him again? I thought he'd scared the pants off you over the films?"

"In a way, yes. But I'm still curious."

She regretted her promise to Superintendent Garrod, but having given it, she could not explain to Mary her position as potential informer or amateur sleuth. Instead she started on the afternoon's discoveries. Mary showed more interest in these.

"Let me have a look at the beads," she demanded.

Jane fished up the string once more, lifted it over her head and handed it to her friend.

"What's the point of wearing them inside your jumper?" Mary asked.

"I didn't put them on for show," Jane answered. "Only to take

them up to show them to Sister when I had time. The Gleaning doesn't like us to wear jewellery of any kind at work, even plain white beads. Anyway a string this length would get in the way. I'm jolly glad I did have them out of sight, as it happens."

"Why?"

"You never know. Gerry may have snoopers in the hospital for all I know."

"Honestly! Aren't you overdoing the cloak and dagger just a tiny bit?"

"Perhaps I am. After all, thousands of girls have white beads."

Jane described her conversation with Sister. Mary was highly amused. She went away and brought back a hammer. Putting a piece of newspaper on the hearth in the sitting-room, she unfastened two beads from the string, put them down and hit them hard.

As before they disintegrated into a white powder and a few more solid chips.

"Hollow!" she said, nodding agreement with Jane's description.

"Exactly. No, don't smash any more. I agree with Sister we shall have to—"

But Mary did not apply the hammer to the third bead she detached from the string. She put it into her mouth.

"Sugar-coated," she said, with satisfaction. "Like all the best pills, you can suck at the start. Pills they are, my girl. Sister was right when she suggested they might carry drugs. Ugh!"

She ran back to the kitchen and spat out the remains of the bead into the sink.

"Bitter in the middle," she said, indistinctly, rinsing her mouth with cold water. "I wonder what the dope is."

"I don't suppose you've swallowed enough for us to find out," said Jane, in a voice of disappointment,

"Callous brute!"

Mary went back to the sitting-room and sat down, clearly observing herself with particular care. Jane sat clown opposite, watching her friend.

At the end of a quarter of an hour Mary said, "I feel very peculiar."

"You've been concentrating," said Jane, kindly. "I expect that's why."

“I can concentrate without feeling dizzy and—well—odd. Distinctly odd.”

“Up or down?” asked Jane.

“Both. One after the other.”

“Not the dizziness, clot! D’ you feel on top of the world or down in the pit?”

“Neither. Just alarmed. The dizziness is now passing off.”

“I suppose,” said Jane, thoughtfully, “I ought to eat a whole one.”

“You’ll do no such thing!” Mary got to her feet, lurched forward, recovered and sat down again.

“Perhaps I’d better not as you’re still under the influence,” said Jane. “I’ll see if I can get hold of Tim.”

“You do that,” said Mary and leaning back in her chair, shut her eyes.

Tim was out, the porter told Jane, but was expected back in an hour. Technically he was on duty, but following his usual habit had gone for a short walk. Jane left a message for him, asking him to ring her when he came in, but the evening passed without his call until at eleven, when Mary was in her bath and Jane preparing to follow her, the front door bell rang and Tim was on the threshold, looking anxious.

“Oh!” said Jane, “I didn’t expect you to come round.”

Tim found this damping.

“They said you rang and wanted to get in touch with me.”

“I asked for you to ring me.”

As this was an accurate statement of the message he had really received, Tim grinned again to cover his slight confusion.

“Well, I’m here,” he said. “May I come in?”

“Of course.”

It was Jane’s turn to feel embarrassment. She took him into the sitting-room, offered him a drink, which he refused and said, irrelevantly, “Mary’s in the bath.”

“Was that what you wanted to tell me?”

Jane laughed.

“Of course not. But it has to do with her, actually.”

“With *Mary*?”

She noticed, with satisfaction, that his first anxious look, dispelled by seeing her safe and sound, did not return.

“In a way, yes.”

She gave him a full account of the poppet bead pills, including her friend's experiment. Tim showed disappointingly little surprise. He said, after some thought, "She spat out most of it, did she?"

"I should think so—yes."

"In that case I shouldn't expect a big reaction. In fact a friend of mine wanted to test these purple hearts, so-called. You know the things I mean? He took one, very cautiously, and it had absolutely no effect whatever. He was very disappointed. Of course the action is sometimes delayed with these things. You rest up to an hour or so and then get results."

"Up to—"

Jane sprang to her feet. She went out into the hall of the flat and called, "Mary!" There was no answer. She rapped on the bathroom door and called again. Quite suddenly Tim was beside her. Jane rattled the handle.

"We don't usually lock ourselves in," she said. "But I heard her put the bolt across when you rang the bell."

"Get out of the way," Tim said, briefly.

He burst through without much difficulty. Mary was half lying, half sitting in the bath, her head and arms dangling over the side. Her eyes were closed.

They lifted her out without speaking and laid her on the bathroom floor. Jane wrapped towels round her while Tim felt her pulse and looked at her pupils.

"Just asleep," he said, cheerfully. "We'll get her into bed first and call Garrod after."

The superintendent was at his own home, also on the way to bed. But he dressed again and arrived at the flat just before midnight. Jane let him in, explaining that Tim had gone back to the hospital since he was on duty there, but had left a note with details of Mary's condition.

"This comes of interference," Garrod said, sternly. "How many times must I tell you and that young man—"

"He had nothing to do with this until he got here tonight," Jane hastened to his defence. "Sister Alexandra and I had a talk about Sheila's beads and Sister smashed one to see what was inside. So when I told Mary about them we smashed another two and then Mary ate one. At least only part of it. She spat it out because the middle was bitter. The outside is sugar-coated,

apparently. Mary said she felt a bit funny but nothing much. It was when I was talking to Tim—Mr Long—and I noticed Mary was too long in the bath—"

"She might have drowned."

"I know," Jane said, miserably. "I think she must have been trying to get out of the bath when the full action of the stuff overtook her. Or else she fell over on account of it."

"Perhaps she'll be able to tell us when she wakes up," Garrod said.

Jane was silent. When would that be? she wondered, She was desperately tired, herself. Was Garrod going to wait until Mary did come round? All night, if need be?

"You may as well give me the rest of the beads, now," the superintendent said.

Jane found an old envelope and poured them into it. She was glad to be rid of them.

Fortified by coffee, but still resentful that his night's rest had been destroyed by these nosey parkers, Garrod kept the vigil until at three in the morning Mary began to stir. In half an hour she was sufficiently herself to understand what had happened and to describe her own part in it.

"It was like a blanket coming down over my head," she said. "Worse than a fog. There was a feeling of weight. I knew what had happened. I was terrified of going off in the water. I tried to get out of the bath, but I slipped."

"As we thought," said Garrod.

He did not question her for long. He was anxious to go home and secure the rest of the night for sleep. So he merely warned Jane once more about unwanted sleuthing and turned to the door.

"She only ate a bit of one," Jane said, seeing him out. "At that rate a whole one might have killed her."

"Let that be an additional warning," Garrod said, maddeningly. "Burgess was an addict, on this evidence. Her dose would have been stepped up a lot. Dangerous drugs are what that means—*dangerous*."

"I'm sorry," said Jane, now almost in tears at the thought of her friend's recent peril.

Garrod relented. She was a very nice girl, doing a worthwhile job, working with those who thought little of personal danger or

discomfort in their job.

"Heard anything from Gerald Stone?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. I was going to report to you only this business of the beads—"

She described her encounter with Gerry, his injury and its treatment.

"So you've made a date with him?"

"Yes. Day after tomorrow. I mean tomorrow—evening. I would have told you today in any case."

Garrod nodded. He believed her.

"What about that other one? The young fellow with the beard? Heard from him, too?"

Jane laughed suddenly. She was beginning to feel lightheaded from fatigue and excess of emotional crisis.

"Not a sausage!" she said, still laughing. "I've waited around for him yesterday and today. He never really looked like being any use."

"Tried ringing up?"

"Today. No answer."

"Did I have his phone number?"

"Can't remember. I can give it you if you like."

"Please."

At last the superintendent was gone. Jane shut the door after him and leaned against it for a minute, too tired to move. But Mary called out to her and she staggered away to answer the call.

"Be an angel and get me some water," Mary said. "I've got a frightful thirst and I'm not too steady on my feet yet."

In the street below, Garrod's man, with feelings of envy and resentment, watched the superintendent's car drive away.

On the other side of the road a passer-by, who was loitering there, increased his pace until he was running swiftly. He slowed down at the main road and began to walk fast. At an all-night café he stopped and went in for a snack.

"Over there in the corner," the proprieter said, pointing.

The man sidled between empty tables to make his report.

Chapter Fourteen

Jane went to the hospital early the next morning and, having changed into her white coat in a wholly empty department, left it again and went up to Alexandra Ward. She was not altogether surprised to find Tim Long in Sister's room.

"The pair of you!" exclaimed Sister. "Why don't you leave it to the police?"

"That's what they keep saying," Jane complained.

"You'll find yourselves had up for obstruction," Sister warned her.

"You were telling me about Mrs Winthrop," Tim interrupted. "I'd like to ask her a few questions myself if I may."

"I don't know that you can. She's very ill. I don't think she'll last the day out, myself. Her bronchitis this autumn has been too much for her heart, now she's over seventy."

"Then tell Miss Wheelan what the night nurse told you."

Sister turned to Jane.

"It was one night when Mrs Winthrop was coughing more than usual. Nurse took her the pills and the inhalant, but she said they weren't doing her any good. Which was a fact. Nurse encouraged her to try them again because she was likely to disturb the whole ward and particularly the patients near her. There was Sheila Burgess on one side and a gastric case on the other. And Mrs Winthrop said, 'The girl won't be disturbed. She's got her own remedy.' So Nurse asked her what she meant and she said, 'That girl eats her beads. I've seen her take one off the string and pop it in her mouth.' "

Jane nodded.

"Just as we thought. They aren't beads at all. They're pills."

"I've told Sister," Tim said.

Sister nodded and went on, "Well, Nurse thought the old dear was rambling, but she decided to keep her eyes open. She noticed that the string of poppets round Sheila's neck was getting shorter every day."

"Why on earth didn't she report it?" exclaimed Jane. "We could have followed it up before she left."

"There was in fact a short reference to it in Nurse's report," Sister explained. "Badly put, so that it seemed to be just something Mrs Winthrop had said."

"Pity. When did you sort it out?"

"Not till after you were here yesterday with the string the parents gave you. I went over her notes again and the ward reports. They haven't been filed in Records yet, in case Superintendent Garrod wants to see them again."

Jane looked at her watch.

"I'll be late!" she said, astonished to find that half an hour had passed since she arrived at the hospital. She fled, found a lift about to descend and dashed into it, closely followed by Tim.

"What about this evening?" he asked, as they reached the bottom and moved away towards the Out-Patient Department.

"I think I ought to stay with Mary," Jane answered. "She wasn't too good this morning. Scared as much as anything, I think."

"Tomorrow, then?"

"Sorry, I've got a date with the man, Stone. Gerry."

She made a face of disgust as she said his name.

"Why on earth—?"

"Police orders. There, I shouldn't have told you! Mr Garrod said—"

"To hell with Mr Bloody Garrod! You're not a volunteer policewoman. He's no right—"

"I *did* volunteer," she said, gently.

Tim was silenced.

"Where's he taking you?" he said at last. They had reached the X-ray Department and Jane's heart sank at the sight of a dozen patients lined up on the benches.

"I don't know. A restaurant, I suppose. A meal. I shall refuse anything else."

"I should damn well hope so. Ring me when you get back. I'm still on duty here. I could have slipped out for an hour, but not for trailing you."

"Don't you dare! Tomorrow or any time. I can look after myself!"

"Famous last words," said Tim and left her.

Garrod's investigations had been going on in a routine, not very productive manner, only interrupted by the preliminary

hearing of the inquest on Sheila Burgess which was adjourned after medical evidence of the cause of death. Multiple injuries, haemorrhage and shock, the postmortem report stated. The injuries were listed in order of severity. They were consistent with a fall from a moving train. There was no evidence of any injury inflicted before the fall.

There never would be any to show if she'd been pushed, Garrod decided. And the same applied to her fall into the river. Two jumps by a suicide or two thrusts by a murderer's hand. A girl driven to desperation, or a girl trying to fight her way out of a vile organisation that had captured her, body and soul? Perhaps neither. Then what had she really intended?

Garrod turned to the reports that had come in. He had caused inquiries to be made at the cluster of houseboats near Hammersmith Bridge. Some were delapidated; some in moderate repair and used at weekends. A few were permanently occupied. It was from the owners of these that Garrod's men discovered the various uses to which the others were put. But ownership was more difficult. However, some sort of description was available in most cases and at the first weekend after Sheila's death Garrod went to the river himself. One of the weekend owners answered to the description of Ronald Bream's partner, Giles Winter. This man had not been present when Garrod had visited the photographer's shop on the day of the train accident, nor had he figured in either of Bream's previous convictions.

Remembering, with sardonic mirth, the well-developed muscles displayed in the blue film, Garrod hailed the dirty-white cabin cruiser by name and when Winter's head appeared in the wheelhouse called, "May I come aboard?"

"Who are you?" came the ungracious answer.

"A long-standing acquaintance of your partner," Garrod answered.

Winter emerged fully on the deck, pushed overboard a rubber dinghy without sculls in it, and holding it by a long painter said, "If you climb over those three boats moored together I can float this over for you."

Garrod did as he was told. Giles Winter gave the dinghy a smart push which sent it skimming over the gap between them, Garrod climbed in and was pulled over to the cabin cruiser. He

stepped up on board.

"Aren't you a bit cut off here?" he asked mildly, when Winter had taken him down to the saloon.

"I only come at weekends," the other answered. "Like to get away for a bit."

"Don't you dry out at low tide?"

"Hardly ever. Perhaps at low water springs if they happen to come at a weekend. But I don't have to stay on board. I can go ashore for a few hours just before she takes the mud and stay away till she's on an even keel again. I can only remember having to do it once."

He looked inquiringly at Garrod.

"Something about Ron?" he asked.

"Indirectly. I'm a police officer. Detective-Superintendent Garrod."

"You could have said that before." Winter's voice was controlled, but his mouth had a nasty twist, his face had grown pale and his eyes, cold and steady, were full of hate.

"So I could. But I thought you would prefer me not to shout it out for the people on the other boats to hear."

"Considerate—hell! Get on with what you want."

"I want to know if Sheila Burgess was on board here before she fell into the river two weeks ago."

Giles Winter stared. Then he said, slowly, "I wouldn't know. I was at the studio that evening, helping Ron."

"You mean both you and Bream had nothing to do with the—accident?"

"That's right. You think quick, don't you?"

"Cut the sarcasm, Winter. Waste of time. Can you tell me who else was likely to be here that night?"

"No. I can't."

"Or won't?"

"Please yourself."

Garrod, who had not expected much co-operation from the man before him, shrugged lightly.

"O.K. It's only yourself you hurt. Mind if I have a look round?"

"Please yourself," Winter repeated and turning away, lit himself a thin cheroot and, still with face averted, began to hum a popular tune.

Garrod's tour of inspection was brief. He was able to establish that the cruiser was used, as Winter had said, for weekend or other short stays. The galley was in working order, reasonably clean. There was ample crockery for four to six people, with wine glasses of various sizes for many more than six. There were a few basic stores; very little fresh food. Of the six bunks only two were made up with sheets. The others had blankets folded and stores on top of them. The engine was a powerful one; well maintained and apparently in running order.

"You take the boat out sometimes, do you?" Garrod asked, reappearing in the cabin to find Winter in the same lounging position as before.

"Up river in the summer, yes."

"And in the autumn and winter? Like now?"

"Depends."

"What on?"

"The weather, chiefly."

Garrod went off again, moving round the decks, looking at the anchor, its chain, the mooring chains fixed to buoys fore and aft, the old tyres used as fenders, the unscrubbed boards and peeling paint. Smartness was not a feature of this vessel, he noted, but she was in perfect working order.

When he had completed his inspection Garrod went back into the cabin once again and repeated his question about Sheila and any probable companion she might have had with her on the night of her rescue from drowning.

"What's it supposed to have to do with me?" Winter said at last, in an angry voice. "She could have been anywhere when she dropped in the drink. Who says she came on board here? How'd she do it?"

"If she had someone with her?"

"If she'd had anyone with her she wouldn't have got round to the suicide attempt," Winter exploded. "Make it out how you damn well like. I'm not interested."

Garrod ignored the outburst.

"We have information," he said, quietly, "that a man and woman were on this boat early that evening. They were seen to come on board. They were heard arguing. At least the woman was heard to raise her voice."

"I suppose this inventive chap told you he heard a scream and

a splash?"

"Unfortunately no."

"Whoever they were you don't know it was Sheila, do you? Or who was with her, if anyone?"

"I was hoping you might be able to help me."

"And I can't oblige. So what?"

"So I'll find out by other means," Garrod said, easily, getting up and leaving the cabin quickly before Winter realised what he was about to do.

On deck he untied the painter of the dinghy, slid down into it, and with the rope still gathered in his hand, gave the cruiser's gunwhale a hard push that shot him across the short space towards the next boat upstream. Even so the swift tide now running took him down to the second boat below this, the one from which he had been pulled across at slack water on the flood half an hour before.

Giles Winter was raging on the deck of the cabin cruiser.

"Sorry," Garrod called. "I'll tie your dinghy up here. You'll have to get one of the other chaps to return it to you."

"You bloody fool!" Giles yelled. "Loosing off like that! You might have gone down among the barges, without me holding you!"

Exactly, Garrod thought. With Winter holding the painter and then letting it go he might have been among the barges and sucked under them and that would have been the end of him.

He called, "Sorry!" once more and climbing carefully from deck to deck of the three boats near the wall, got back to the land without looking round again. He did look back, however, as he reached his car, parked behind the tow path. The deck of the cabin cruiser was empty; Winter had gone below.

Back at the Yard Garrod found a report from the laboratory. The poppet beads contained two drugs. Some held a form of hemp. Others contained heroin. There was a slight difference in size in the two, enough to show the initiated what they were eating.

Another report told him that Francis Hill, the uncouth young man who had appeared in such an elusive fashion to Jane Wheelan, seemed to have left his lodgings. He was not available on the telephone. His studio door was locked; no one came to open it in spite of prolonged ringing. The rooms were rented

unfurnished, by a landlord who lived in Bedford. The rent had been paid regularly, in quarterly amounts. The rest of the property, a mews over garages, was let in similar fashion. Most of the inmates were out all day. They had very little to do with each other. One of them, questioned, thought Hill had gone home for a holiday. He had spoken of doing so. His parents were living and quite well off. As a rule Hill avoided other people.

Garrod decided that the drug report was sufficient reason for more drastic action to find Hill. He was not surprised when he reached the mews, where the row of so-called studios housed a collection of near-tramps, to hear again that Francis Hill had not been seen about for several days.

Nor was he really surprised, though he blamed himself severely, when he and two officers with him forced the door, to find the young man dead. But the manner of his death was both a surprise and a shock. For Hill had not succumbed to his drug addiction or committed suicide on account of it. He had been brutally and violently murdered, fighting for his life in a struggle that had wrecked his room, scattered his pathetically inadequate paintings, overturned his meagre sticks of furniture and had even started a fire near his small open grate. Fortunately this had encountered a flood of water from an overturned jug and had petered out.

"Or he survived long enough to pour the water on it," Garrod said, grimly assessing the young man's injuries.

This view was upheld by the experts. Francis Hill had been dead for two or three days. He had died from multiple injuries, chiefly stab wounds and blows from a blunt weapon that had wrecked his face without cracking his skull.

The ash from the fire outside the hearth was unproductive. No drugs were found in the room, only traces were discovered in Hill's body. But these were suggestive. The most important find was discovered where his murderers had failed to find it, in the lining of his jacket, reached through a tear in one of the pockets. This was a scrap of paper, dirty, torn, the writing on it almost indecipherable. But just clear enough.

When Garrod saw it he put a call through to Professor Marsden. While he waited to get through he stared down at the grimy scrap on his desk. What he saw was a row of numerals and of these the first two were familiar. They were the same two

numbers that appeared first in line on the folded paper hidden in the spool of the blue film. Above them, on Hill's slip, was the one word, in brackets, 'cafe'.

Chapter Fifteen

Professor Marsden listened to Garrod's account of young Hill's death with an expression of growing horror. But when the slip of paper was placed before him, this changed to his habitual look of intelligent interest. Without any prompting he said, "It begins like the other, doesn't it?"

"Exactly. With a most considerate clue beside or rather above those two figures."

"Café without the accent. Caife, in fact. An address?"

"I think so. We're still checking with the probable divisions."

"Which do you consider the probable divisions?"

"North of the river to start with. Anything that would come within a few miles radius of Bream's photographic establishment. That would include Chelsea, Kensington and a slice north of the parks, Shepherd's Bush, Notting Hill, Bayswater, perhaps."

"A wide field. Good luck to you. When you say north of the parks does that take you out as far as Hampstead or at least Camden Town?"

"Why do you say that?" Garrod was a little startled.

"You are prospecting in the student dormitory areas, aren't you?"

"Well, yes."

The professor was very much on the ball, Garrod decided. In view of what he wanted to ask him to do, there could be no harm in putting him a little further into the picture. He told Marsden about the beads.

The professor took this more quietly than the news of the artist's death.

"That fits," he said, nodding with satisfaction. "So now you're after the distribution, I suppose. In which this paper and these figures may be relevant."

"Yes. The caife is in Camden Town, we think."

The professor laughed.

"My bull's eye was quite fortuitous, I do assure you."

"I believe you, sir. There is only one establishment of the kind

with a street number corresponding to those two numerals. It must be the headquarters of this particular organisation. A branch one, perhaps. If we aren't entirely off the beam we might flush them there."

"How? How do I come into it?"

Superintendent Garrod leaned forward and explained his plan.

Later that evening Professor Marsden with a companion halted outside the small insignificant eating house in a side street off the busy main road through Camden Town. They had travelled by bus to Mornington Crescent and had walked from there. When they reached the café, Marsden checked the house number once more and then, pushing the curtained, half-glassed door, went in.

The place was larger inside than he expected. A narrow front portion flanked with tables on either side turned a corner near a pay-desk to spread out into a rear part where three rows of tables gave quite comfortable seating space to the customers.

There was a fair number of people already eating, both men and women. Three family parties with small, thin, dark children, had grouped two or more of the tables together. Most of the customers, Marsden saw, were Mediterranean types. Here and there an obvious Englishman sat with a dark-eyed, sallow-complexioned girl. At other tables there were groups of young men and girls from India or the Far East.

Professor Marsden, ignoring a waved indication from the pay-desk, chose a table against the wall in the wider part of the café. His companion sat down opposite. The professor smiled at him.

"I told you we should have an ethnically interesting evening," he said.

The other flashed a brilliant smile at him. He was, himself, of Middle Eastern birth, in London studying law. He had met the professor at a club frequented by his compatriots, and being a clever, cultivated young man, had made the most of the acquaintance. It had been a surprise, a relief, an unusual interest to exchange views with a man who not only had a profound academic knowledge of his native land, its history and culture, but also spoke his language fluently, idiomatically and without noticeable accent.

A waiter approached. Marsden said to his companion in English, "You order. You'll know what we ought to have."

The waiter, in very halting English, began to explain, but the law student, speaking softly in his own tongue, suggested other dishes.

Marsden watched carefully. The waiter showed no surprise, made a few scratched marks on a pad and left in the direction of the kitchen. But out of the corner of his eye the professor saw him pause at the pay-desk, murmur something to the woman in charge there and then pass on through the service swing door. Immediately afterwards the woman picked up a speaking tube from below her desk and spoke into it. Almost at once a stout black-haired individual with a large, pale face came out of a door on the side of the desk opposite that of the service door and waddling past their table disappeared from Marsden's view.

"We will speak in French," the professor said, lightly. "I think he will not understand that."

"The waiter heard you use English," the law student replied, thoughtfully, also in French.

"True. And you instructed him in your own language."

"But I don't think he understood properly. He is an Arab, I think. He took down the numbers of the dishes I pointed to, not the names."

"The man who has just come in, who looks to me like the manager, has obviously been called by madam on our account. You noticed the waiter spoke to her?"

"Yes."

"Where is the fat man now? Can you see him? I didn't turn round."

"In the corner behind you, four tables away. He is clearly concentrating on our conversation. He is certainly European. I think we should use a different language."

"What do you suggest?"

"Persian," said the law student, unexpectedly.

Professor Marsden laughed.

"Very well," he said, using the Persian equivalent.

The law student blushed.

"I am not as fluent as you," he said, "but for our present purpose I can manage, I hope."

Their food came almost immediately. It was too greasy, Marsden decided, but much better than he had dared to hope. In the equivalent English café, he decided, the fried alternative

would have been uneatable.

They ate slowly, exchanging solemn remarks in Persian. From time to time the professor's companion reported on the activities of the fat man in the corner.

"He is drinking Turkish coffee," he said, "and looking very puzzled. A little—" he broke into English, "bored. I don't know how to say that in Persian."

Marsden gave him a long and rather flowery rendering. They both laughed. The fat man, the student said, with relish, now looked very sour.

While they were drinking their coffee the professor signalled to the waiter for the bill. By now most of the tables in the café were filled and the noise of conversation in several languages and all at a high pitch effectively covered any remarks the two might exchange.

Before the waiter came back, Marsden handed his companion the scrap of paper found in Hill's jacket.

"Now we have come to your part in this expedition," he said, leaning a little closer to the young man. "I shall speak a few words to the waiter and sort out some coins in my hand. While I am doing this I want you to slip him the paper and watch carefully what he does with it. I shall visit the Gents and then pay my bill at the desk before coming back to the table."

The law student began to look alarmed.

"You will not leave me alone? What do you expect to happen?"

"I don't quite know. But I can guess."

"Then tell me. Tell me!"

"No. Better not. If they come over and question you, you just say you were asked to hand in the paper and receive the answer."

"Receive—? But what answer? Another paper, a verbal message—? I am very unwilling—"

"Hush! The waiter is coming back. Don't worry at all. I shall be away a very few minutes."

The law student leaned back in his chair. His attitude was tense, his black eyes very bright, his whole appearance far too conspiratorial, Marsden decided. He sighed. For the first time he wondered if his simple plan was too simple and if the answer would come in simple, brutal, physical terms. In which case he

and his ally were obvious losers.

But the waiter was now beside him, so he suppressed his sudden anxieties and bringing up a handful of coin from his pocket he began to sort out a generous tip, at the same time praising the meal in Arabic. When he looked up, holding out the tip in his palm, he met an eager, flushed face and eyes behind which some message struggled for expression.

Disregarding the rapid, whispered thanks of the waiter Marsden got up and moved in a slow dignified manner to the marked door at the end of the room. To reach it he passed the fat man's table. The latter was in the act of rising and seemed nearly as excited as the waiter had been.

When Professor Marsden reached the pay-desk the law student was already standing there, waiting.

"I have paid," he said and turned towards the door. Marsden followed him, asking no questions.

They stood for a moment outside the café. Across the road the professor saw a sports car with a man inside it, who was leaning sideways to read his newspaper by the light of the street lamp under which he was parked.

Marsden took the law student's arm and turned left down the street. The lights of the main road blazed ahead, about a hundred yards away. They began to walk towards them.

But glancing round a few seconds later Marsden saw the man in the sports car jump out and hurry across the road into the café.

"We will walk faster," he said and added, "What happened?"

"They brought me a carton like for sweets," said the law student in English. "The fat man brought it on a plate and put it down on our table without speaking. The carton had a label with Turkish delight written on it."

"The cashier had some on her desk, I noticed," said Marsden. "Where is it now?"

"In my brief-case," said the student, panting a little. His legs were much shorter than the professor's and he had enjoyed his meal.

"I think we had better get on a bus," said Marsden, breaking into an ungainly trot.

They were a few yards from the main road when a small old car jerked to a halt beside them. Garrod leaned across to open

the single door, pushing forward the passenger seat as he did so.

"Hop in!" he said. "Quick!"

Professor Marsden, breathing heavily, and the law student, quite out of breath, scrambled in and pulled the door shut. At the same moment the sports car roared past them round the corner, regardless of oncoming traffic, and disappeared.

"If you hadn't rushed away from the place like that you wouldn't have had to run at all," Garrod said, severely. "I was waiting to pick you up."

"The man in that sports car." Marsden said, still panting a little. "He went into the café! Directly after we turned down the street. I thought—"

"I know." Garrod answered. "He wanted to check. Did you have any luck?"

"Oh, yes." the professor said, with satisfaction.

The law student undid his brief-case and pulled out a package.

"This is the one the fat man brought to my table." he said, smiling faintly.

"Turkish delight label on the outside," Garrod said, glancing at it as it was held in front of him. "Turn it over."

The student handed it to Marsden, who examined it on every side.

"It isn't fastened," he said. "Only the edges turned inside."

As he fiddled with it the flap pulled out and two soft sugary lumps fell on his lap.

"Turkish delight," said Garrod, in a voice of disgust. "They rumbled you, obviously."

The law student in the back of the car was leaning forward, earnestly.

"That was indeed the carton the manager brought to my table, but it is not the one he had brought out from the room behind the desk. That one he put down among the ones near the cashier. I witness this exchange. I make note of the carton. I go at once pay the bill and take the carton in my pocket. Here the carton!"

His English had become more rapid and less coherent during this long speech. But there was no mistaking his triumph as he handed over the second carton.

"Good boy!" said Garrod, with unprofessional warmth and familiarity. Then, recovering himself he added, "You'll keep all

this under your hat, sir, won't you?"

When the professor had translated this rather obscure idiom the law student agreed.

"Very happy to oblige," he said, graciously. "I make a statement, yes? Then I hope no personal appearance will be necessary."

"I'll see to that," Garrod assured him.

Both cartons went to the laboratory. The one the manager had given to the law student was genuine Turkish delight. The other contained similar sugary lumps, filled with small tubes of heroin tablets and also of hemp in powder form. Given the quantities and provenance of these drugs Professor Marsden had no further difficulty in decoding the numbered messages. It related to the amount supplied, which was to be delivered to a messenger sent to the café.

So much for Hill's paper. The one found in the film was an order. Presumably the order, hidden in an exported batch of undeveloped, but exposed film, would reach the supplier and be made up accordingly.

"So young Hill was a messenger," Marsden said. "Probably a distributor, too. An addict?"

"Oh yes, undoubtedly. But he had enough of a conscience left to worry about Sheila. Perhaps when he saw Miss Wheelan and realised how far down the hill he had slipped—"

"A very sentimental conclusion," the professor said, drily, "which don't find at all convincing. Much more likely he was scared for his own safety and thought he might make a garbled confession through Miss Wheelan in the hope of getting in right with you chaps."

"I still think his main concern was Sheila Burgess and her fate."

"Have it your own way," Marsden said. "The poor lad's dead, after all. Where d'you go from here?"

Garrod looked at him apologetically.

"Can't say, sir."

"You mean the expert's done his bit and won't be needed again."

"I didn't say so."

"You said the nearest thing to it. All right. Time I gave some attention to my real work. Incidentally our eastern friend is up

for his finals next week. He regarded our jaunt as a welcome relief from swotting. If he's through he goes home at the end of the month, which might be convenient from several points of view."

When Garrod was alone he took out a file marked 'Gerald Stone'. He had recognised the sports car from its number. Inquiries begun before had been pressed since the event in the café. The result was interesting.

Gerald Stone—it seemed to be his real name—had worked as a very young man for a firm of exporters that had been wrecked by Suez and its aftermath. With their assets sequestrated, the goodwill gone, no compensation in the near offing, the firm had first sent out Stone to gather details, then had gone into liquidation. It showed how hopeless they were that they sent out such a very junior executive, clever though he had undoubtedly proved himself. Stone was in Egypt for three months. He discovered a great many interesting facts, it seemed, and at the same time avoided being thrown into prison for alleged spying. When he got back to England he reported to his firm and gave in his notice. He found a job with another firm that made and distributed cameras. He was still with this firm. Hence his connection with professional photography, and possibly his introduction to the Bream outfit. The camera firm was above suspicion, according to Garrod's information. The question now was had Stone, with contacts made in Egypt, set up a drug importing organisation on his own. If so, how large an organisation was it? How wide were the vice interests and of what kind besides these films and drugs, and was Stone at the head of the ring or merely the useful head of a local branch?

At present Superintendent Garrod was not prepared to lay any bets. But the English market for drugs was comparatively small. The set-up in many ways was amateurish, careless, even muddled. Time would show. Perhaps Miss Wheelan would help on the process, now that her contact with Stone had been re-established.

Chapter Sixteen

Jane changed her clothes the following evening with feelings that rocked back and forth between excited bravado and sheer terror. In the event she was merely bored.

Gerry called for her punctually. He had the sports car in the road.

"Local or further out?" he asked.

"Local what?"

"Eating place. Local restaurant, road house, country pub?'

Jane's first thought was to accept the country pub, but she remembered country lanes and said, "Local if that's all right by you? I've been dashing around all day. I'd rather not do much travelling now."

"As modom wishes," Gerry said. "Only there's nothing quite close in this god-forsaken part of the town, is there? Chelsea do you?"

"Of course."

Her heart sank. Chelsea was now permanently stained in her mind with the memory of Tom and his hard-faced wife and particularly with a vision of long hair and a wild unkempt beard and dirty clothes whose owner, Garrod had told her that morning, had been brutally murdered. Perhaps by the man at her side.

"Cold?" Gerry asked. "Pull up the window if you are."

"Not really. I often feel shivery at the end of the day, when I have time to relax."

"You're grossly overworked. I could see that when I was in your department."

"How is the wrist?" Jane asked, belatedly. She had forgotten to ask about it because there was nothing much wrong with it. But Gerry was not to know that.

"The plaster was stopping the circulation in my hand," he answered. "Besides hurting like hell. So I went to my own chap —my own doctor, I mean. Had him cut it off. The plaster of course. Not the hand."

Jane forced herself to laugh at the feeble joke. Certainly he

had got over any bruising and restricted movement. He was using the unplastered hand at the wheel, sometimes alone.

"Your head dragon was off the beam," Gerry said, a few seconds later. "I don't believe there was any sign of a fracture at all, was there?"

"I'm never much good at scaphoids," Jane answered.

She did not intend to enlarge on the subject. It was the last thing she wanted. After a day spent in teaching and soothing anxious, uncomprehending men and women, she had no wish to begin another lecture now.

Nor did Gerry pursue the subject. He, too, seemed to pay little attention to the injured wrist. After completing the short drive in silence, he parked the car in a side road and took Jane through a series of small streets to a turning off the King's Road and a very respectable Italian restaurant with shaded candles on the tables and respectful waiters in white jackets.

The food was good, the conversation increasingly boring. Gerry continued to ask questions about her job, about the detail of the work, the monotony, the uncertain hours.

"But I like it," she said, more than once. "I like never knowing what'll turn up next. I like working out the best way to get the right photograph. It isn't all hones by any means, you know. There are terribly complicated investigations, whole series of films—"

"Don't go on," Gerry said, laughing. "Don't find another batch of examples, or I won't be able to finish my dinner. I accept the fact that you'd rather be a radiographer than the Queen of Sheba."

"Much rather." Jane said. "She had hairy legs, didn't she?"

"I believe she did." Gerry was giving her a very speculative look now. She regretted her careless talk. "You wouldn't have hairy legs, would you?"

"It makes her sound like a spider," Jane said, wildly, staring at the fat straw-dressed bottle between them. A perfectly ordinary chianti, she thought indignantly. Or had he done something to it, to make her so silly? It must be time to end this meal.

She sighed.

"Tired?" asked Gerry, in the soft voice that had attracted her the first time she met him.

"A bit."

"You work too hard."

"We've been into that."

"You could use your skill in pleasanter ways."

"Such as?"

Her voice was a challenge, far too obvious a challenge. He rejected it—far too easily.

"Oh, I don't know."

But he did know and she knew and he knew that she knew and she knew that he—

Jane pulled herself together. His hand had found her knee under the table. For a moment it rested there then he took it away and signalled to the waiter for coffee.

At the door of the flat he kissed her, firmly but without passion. Then, before leaving, he invited her to a party on the following evening.

"A party?" Jane repeated, not taking it in. She was feeling very sleepy, very stupid.

"Yes. Some of the people you met before. Not all. I've been asked to bring a girl. There's no girl I'd like to take as much as you, Jane."

For a second she wondered if all her suspicion, her dislike, her distrust, were mere prejudice. Garrod had said, several times, that they had nothing on Stone. Could he really be another victim? Another, like Sheila, deceived into collaborating with criminals? An honest man, trying to extricate himself?

She felt unequal to the effort of dealing with such a question. But her natural inclination to help the oppressed, whether it was illness or misfortune that assailed them, made her reach up to kiss Gerry very gently and agree to go with him.

His final embrace was crushing. Jane felt his sense of triumph, of savage victory sweep over her in a scorching wave from which she recoiled in utter revulsion. She fought to control her sudden panic and just succeeded. But she was trembling and shaken and thanked him in a weak voice and having closed the door, leaned against it for a second or two with her eyes shut, her heart racing.

It was not the physical effect of her contact with Gerry that so disturbed her. It was her sudden realisation of him as a totally predatory animal, a self-centred, self-absorbed destroyer, ruthless in his aims and exulting in his power to deceive and

conquer.

Well, he had not conquered her and she knew now why he could never succeed. For in the middle of that last kiss, when his lips were bruising hers and his tongue violated her unwilling mouth she had thought suddenly of Tim, seeing his plain, clever face, his strong body and large fine hands, appealing in her heart to him for help, for rescue.

She heaved herself away from the door and went to her room, passing the telephone in the hall of the flat. She subdued her instant wish to ring up Tim. She had been in love several times but never quite like this. Tim was far more than a romantic idea, a sop to vanity, an excuse to boast to herself, or a purely physical attraction. She thought and hoped fervently that they had more in common than this squalid piece of police work. But so far he had made none of the usual advances. He seemed to take her for granted as part of his interest in and feeling of responsibility for, Sheila's fate. Besides, the hospital gossip still linked him with the rather beautiful Nurse Cooper, who had been stringing him along for months, they all said.

So, in her new knowledge of herself, Jane did not ring up Tim that evening, but merely reported to Superintendent Garrod that she had spent a totally unproductive evening with Gerry, who had done no more than attempt to shake her loyalty to the hospital, but had invited her to another party on the following Saturday evening. She did not know where this was to be held, but Gerry was to pick her up at the flat at nine o'clock in the evening. It was to be a wine and cheese party. He had not invited her to dinner beforehand.

Tim, spending a quiet evening in his own flat, found his reading less than peaceful and almost worthless. Knowing that Jane was spending these hours, or some of them, with Stone, got between him and any assimilation of the facts in the various medical papers he was trying to absorb. When she failed to ring him up he became at first anxious, then definitely worried, finally depressed. Perhaps even Jane, who now so often got between him and his work, was leading him up the garden.

After feeling furious with her for half an hour and resisting for another ten minutes a strong wish to ring her up himself, he decided to have it out with her at the hospital the next day. She must stop seeing Stone. She must stop being Garrod's stooge. It

was far too dangerous

But the next day proved more and more frustrating. Tim's work kept him totally occupied all through the working hours. He could make only one attempt to find Jane in the X-ray Department and she was not there at that time. But he managed to get away from the hospital just after six and after going home rang her up and found her in. Not only in but very anxious to talk to him.

"Why didn't you call me last night, then?"

"I—well, I was—it was rather late."

She sounded confused—upset. The thing was getting her down, Tim decided.

"Look, have you fed yet? No, you can't have. Come out to dinner."

"I'd love to, only—"

"Only what?"

"Well, I've got to go to a wretched party—"

"Go on."

"Tim, I don't really want to go, but I must. Garrod knows and he'll be keeping watch and—"

Tim exploded.

"God damn it, don't say this Stone wants you out *again*? Two days running!"

"I'm terribly sorry—"

Her voice broke: to Tim's horror she seemed to be crying.

"Listen," he said, speaking in a slow gentle voice, as he did in the children's ward. "Tell me when and where this party is, then we can arrange something. Right?"

She told him. Gerry had left a message with Mary that morning to say she must bring a warm coat because the party was going to be on a houseboat on the Thames. He hadn't said where the houseboat was. She had told Superintendent Garrod and he had said she was to carry on. Everyone would know, including the River Police.

"Damn Garrod!" said Tim fiercely. "O.K. Well have dinner at that little place round the corner from you. Meet me there in half an hour."

Jane agreed and rang off. She was pleased to remember that she had not suggested this restaurant the night before to Gerry. It would have been contaminated now if she had done so. As it

was it remained and she hoped would always remain a special property of hers and Tim's.

When Jane had rung off. Tim got on to Garrod, was told to mind his own business, but managed to discover, aided by his previous intuition, that the houseboat party was expected to take place on Giles Winter's boat near Hammersmith Bridge.

So, after a warm, encouraging, delightful meal with Jane, who looked quite lovely that evening, he thought, much prettier than the Cooper girl could ever hope to be, with her cold, set face and manner, Tim set off in his own car for Hammersmith Bridge. He parked it in a side turning off the approach road and went on foot to the tow path. In the car he had exchanged his jacket for an old wind-cheater over a sweater. His appearance was now quite unremarkable, a slightly scruffy young man among hundreds who looked just the same.

Meanwhile Jane, feeling comforted and protected and more than ever in love with Tim, walked home quickly to wait for Gerry. He came punctually at a quarter to nine and they drove off together.

Though the party seemed to he composed of much the same type of person she had met before and had no particular wish to meet again, Jane lost most of her misgivings in the interest and excitement of boarding a boat on the river.

The party was still assembling when Gerry led her down to the towpath, having parked his car in the same side road where Tim had put his. In fact, as the two appeared together at the river wall Tim, standing back in the shadows, saw them arrive and was pleased to find his reasoning had been correct.

Two dinghies were plying back and forth between the cabin-cruiser and the landing steps. Jane and Gerry had to wait in an informal queue until those in front of them had been taken off.

There was a good deal of wind. Jane was glad she had brought a scarf. She tied it over her hair while they waked.

Then it was their turn, Jane was handed into the small rocking boat and sat down. Gerry followed. A long-haired boy, whom Jane had not seen before, pushed off and took them across. They were welcomed on board and led below. Jane found herself being greeted effusively by Ronald Bream and his wife. Tom and Toni came up, the former carrying two glasses of wine. Jane answered the greetings politely and while Gerry

started a brisk conversation with his friends, stood back and looked about her.

The saloon of the launch was tightly packed with visitors. There must have been quite thirty there, she thought, realising that the boat was much larger than she had imagined and very pleasantly roomy below.

"What d'you think of her?" asked Giles Winter at her elbow.

She turned with a start to face him. The same thin face and strange cold eyes. Remembering Sheila, Jane felt renewed dislike and revulsion.

"She's quite big, isn't she?" she said, feeling confused and stupid. "How many of you live here?"

"Only me. Only at weekends. But I have a crew, of course, when I go to sea."

"Oh!" Gerry had spoken of a houseboat, not an active craft. "I thought it was a houseboat," she added, to explain her surprise.

"So she is, most of the time. But I take her out occasionally."

"Is that why we had to come on board in a dinghy? I wondered. The other boats seem to be joined together and to the wall."

Giles laughed.

"Yes, I'm on a mooring. Observant girl, aren't you? The noticing kind."

Jane flushed. There was a barely hidden antagonism behind his speech, a contemptuous dislike that the voice did not conceal.

"How many crew do you take?" she asked, determined to hold her own with him.

"I have berths for four. Two in here and two in the cabin up forward. Like to see?"

She gave a rather artificial laugh.

"Not a hope, is there? With all this crowd."

Tom was at her side with a bottle, filling her glass. Toni handed a plate of cheese bits on sticks and another of olives. Gerry, behind them, said, "Why don't we all go on deck? No air down here."

Very slowly they pushed through the crowd to the foot of the companion-way and up it into the night air. There were fewer people here, mostly younger than those below, Jane noticed several flushed faces and blank eyes; she heard blurred speech

and silly phrases. The drink had been circulating very freely up here in the dark, she thought; the drink or the dope? Probably both, and highly dangerous at that.

Gerry took her arm, edging her along towards the bows. Here among the various tackle on the deck some of the couples had bestowed themselves for further enjoyment. Gerry moved inboard to put himself between Jane and the dark humped forms, squeezing her to the rail.

They were on the river side of the launch, the windward side, but Jane welcomed the cold stream of air against her face. She looked down at the dark water. The tide, which had been full and slack when they came off to the launch, had now turned. The water ran past in rippling circles, chuckling as it ran off the curve of the hull. She remembered Sheila again and shivered. The wine had loosened her thoughts and her tongue.

"Did she fall in from here?" she asked the river, staring down at it.

There was no answer. Looking up Jane saw that she was alone with Gerry; the others had gone back along the deck. She felt his arms go round her, saw his face close to her own.

"Sheila!" she cried, pushing him away. "Did she fall in from here, from this boat? She must have! There was nowhere on the towpath—"

He pulled her close.

"Darling, darling!" the soft false voice was murmuring. "I love you. Love me as you did the other night. Darling!"

He was so intent upon subduing her that he did not hear, or did not rightly interpret, the powerful chug of the police launch engine. But Jane heard it and fought him off with renewed vigour. A moment later a brilliant beam swept the decks from end to end.

"Christ!"

Gerry dived for the shelter of the wheelhouse behind them, still clutching Jane with one hand, trying to drag her with him. But freed from his arms she had clung to the rail with one hand and now tore herself from his grasp and stood upright, her face turned to the searchlight, staring full into it to make sure of recognition.

The light swept away and was turned off. The launch appeared to move on up the river. Looking round Jane found

herself quite alone.

The cabin cruiser rocked as the visitors crowded out on to the decks. Standing still where Gerry had left her, Jane saw that their numbers were already very much reduced. They must have been leaving quietly from the other side all the time she had been there with Gerry. How long was that? Surely not more than a few minutes?

She put a hand to her head. It was aching and she felt more than ever confused and far away. How silly to come here at all! How absurd to drink anything with this bunch of obvious crooks!

What a panic they were in just because a searchlight had played over them! She laughed aloud.

"Jane!"

She started violently. It was Tim's voice, low, urgent, but she could see no one. The wind was stronger than ever now, blowing straight across the river from the opposite bank. She hugged her coat round her, wondering if she had really heard a voice or not.

"Jane!" it came again. "Listen. I'll get you off and you must go home as quick as you can. Don't recognise me. Go round to the boats and I'll get you off."

She moved obediently. As she passed into the small crowd waiting near the rail on the shore side of the launch she looked down and saw Tim, sitting in one of the dinghies, waiting to move up for passengers.

But before his turn came, or hers, Gerry was beside her again, taking her arm, pushing her forward, ordering people out of their way and succeeding in moving them. She saw with disgust and mounting fear that Tim was not able to help her now. She was forced into a waiting dinghy and swept away with Gerry.

Looking back despairingly she saw Tim tie up the small boat he was in and clamber quickly on board the launch. Then they were at the steps, she was helped up them and with Gerry again at her elbow, marched away.

In silence they reached the side road and the sports car. In silence Gerry unlocked it and ordered her into the passenger seat. Her head was clearer now. An acute sense of danger

sharpened her clouded wits.

"Where are we going?" she asked, when he failed to take the road that led to her flat.

"The hospital," he said. "There is something there you have to show me, my dear."

Chapter Seventeen

Tim stayed where he was until he saw Gerry moving off along the towpath with Jane. Though he would have preferred to see her leave alone, when he could have caught her up before she had gone very far, he was relieved to see her back on solid earth and moving away from the river.

When there was no further chance of his being recognised, he pulled himself up on to the deck of the launch. But three of the remaining guests who stood clustered near the rail, impatiently waiting to get ashore, asked to be taken off, so he embarked once more. The ebb was beginning to run fast, now. He had some difficulty getting alongside the steps and more still in returning again to the cabin-cruiser.

Arrived there he found his services were no longer needed. The other dinghy had removed the last of the guests, the deck was deserted.

Tim's first thought was to go ashore by himself, take his car to Jane's flat and find her there. But the empty deck above him was very tempting. If the launch was really deserted, why not take a look round her? He was puzzled by the sudden dispersal of the party. It was not late. They had seemed to be enjoying themselves. Drink was circulating freely, morale was high, but no one showed the usual bad temper and aggression of the partly drunk.

True the wind had got up, with the suddenness it often showed over water. The launch was rolling at her mooring. Being a good sailor he had not been bothered by it. Perhaps they had. Perhaps they felt sick. Particularly the addicts. Well, serve them right if they did.

He had not understood the full significance of the searchlight. He had not realised how it would seem to the guilty consciences on board. The little addicts, as fearful of losing their supplies as they were of having them found in their pockets, were ready to panic at the slightest hint of police interest. Though they knew nothing of the Bream gang's inner workings and depended upon them with a pitiful, desperate trust, they knew that at the first

danger sign of trouble with the police they must remove themselves immediately and thereafter swear total ignorance. They had a double interest in this; to save themselves from the penalties of the law and also from the reprisals of the gang if they should in any way betray it.

Climbing back on to the launch Tim moved silently round the decks. The wind was stronger now, blowing direct inshore. No one lurked in the shadows, no one rose up to confront him. It would have been too cold to stay out in any case, he decided. But a light still shone in the cabin, so he went up to the open door of the wheelhouse, passed in and peered down the companionway.

At first he saw only litter and the stains of spilt drink and cigarette ash. Then he saw a leg thrust out and as he moved down to discover the owner a drunken voice said, "Whas—at?"

Giles Winter was sprawling on one of the bunks, his jacket off, his tie hanging loose, his eyes half-closed.

"The others have all gone ashore," said Tim. "D' you want to be ferried over?"

"Who th'hell are you?"

"One of the party. The dinghy's outside."

"Live here," Giles said, rolling over so that his face was hidden from Tim. "My boat. Sleep aboard. You want sleep aboard?"

"Not particularly," Tim said. But he moved towards the forward cabin door. It was a chance to have a real look round. A chance not to be missed.

"Please yourself," Giles muttered, not looking round.

He seemed to be passing out pretty rapidly, Tim thought, so he moved gently forward and passed through the cabin door and shut it very quietly after him.

The rolling of the launch made movement slow and difficult. Holding on to the top of one of the bunks Tim looked about him.

The two berths were piled with folded blankets. They did not seem to have been used for some time. The man in the saloon probably used the seat he was now lying on, Tim decided.

Under each bunk there was a drawer that pulled out. Both were quite empty. Beyond, another closed door led to a forepeak with a wash-basin and lavatory set at one side and a jumble of rope, shackles, empty petrol tins and a couple of large anchors at the other.

Which makes three, Tim thought, looking at them, remembering the one lashed in chocks on the foredeck.

He began to turn over the junk, vaguely disappointed that he had found nothing of sinister import anywhere on board. His foot slipped on a round object. He picked it up. An anchor buoy, evidently. Well, that was natural enough. A good idea to buoy the anchor. Was this the only one or did they have one for each anchor?

He went on searching, turning over lengths of rope, mooring lines mostly, one large coil he could not move. A towing line, perhaps?

Then he found it. Made of plastic, coloured to look like brown glass, even painted with an exact replica of the label of a well-known beer. The narrow end was shaped with a scooped-out hollow; the base of the bottle had a flange with a hole in it through which a light line could be threaded.

It could be another anchor buoy, but who wanted an anchor buoy elaborately got up to look like a floating bottle?

A floating bottle! A bottle that could carry any reasonably light package attached to its base. It would bob about, disregarded, until it was located by those for whom it was intended.

Tim's excitement rose. Now he understood. The launch picked up the supplies somewhere at the mouth of the Thames. Stick a cork, a real cork, in the top of the false plastic bottle, supply it to the chap with the goods, probably at the last port of call before London. All he had to do was tie on a prepared, waterproofed package and drop the whole thing overboard minus the cork. The launch and the organisation did the rest.

Pushing the thing inside his windcheater Tim retreated into the cabin and moved to the saloon door. He turned the handle carefully and pushed. Nothing happened. Feeling a sudden nausea, a quick wave of self-condemnation, he tried again and pushed hard, not caring now if he made a noise.

Giles Winter's voice, clear and sharp, not at all drunken, said, "No go, my friend. We don't like snoopers."

"Open this door," Tim ordered. "Can't your guests visit the heads without having this feeble sort of joke?"

"No joke at all. We know who you are. You weren't invited."

Tim forced himself to speak quietly.

"If it isn't a joke, what is it? You can't keep me here

indefinitely. I would very soon be missed at the hospital."

"Did you tell anyone where you were going?"

It was a new voice that spoke. Though Tim did not know the man. Ronald Bream had joined his partner in the saloon.

"Yes," lied Tim and added truthfully, "They all know I like to walk down to the bridge in the evening."

"But you didn't walk, did you?"

So they knew that, too. Probably knew he had taken Jane out to dinner and where. While he was considering the full significance of his position the door opened suddenly and he found himself confronted by Winter with a levelled gun and a short stout figure he had noticed at the rail while he was trying to take off Jane.

"Come out," Winter said. "Ron wants to go in there. Come out and stand against that wall."

Tim had no alternative. Bream went rapidly into the cabin and beyond into the forepeak. After a few seconds he came out again.

"Nix," he said. His face was anxious, sweating a little.

"Frisk him," Winter ordered.

Bream found the plastic buoy almost at once.

"That settles it."

Winter motioned to Tim with a sideways jerk of his head. "Back inside," he said grimly.

Tim saw that he meant it, that he would not hesitate to use the gun. He went back into the cabin, the door was locked again from the outside. At the same instant the light went out.

All right, he thought, let them think they have me bottled, let them go. They'd be a jump ahead, he knew, but with all that stuff in the forepeak, the spare anchors, the chain, the rope, he ought to be able to break his way out when he was alone.

He waited. The voices died away. They had gone out on deck. Presently he heard sounds again, coming now from the outside of the hull, a hoarse shout, a few bumps, then silence again, unbroken, final he hoped.

It was only now that he realised he was standing in an inch of water.

He stared down in the darkness, unbelieving, suddenly very much afraid. He felt it seep into his shoes, coldly mount over them. Before he recovered enough to move it was halfway up his

calf and lapping against the sides of the bunks.

He sprang into the forepeak to drag out an anchor and hurl it against the door. But in the dark, under water, it was not easy to locate anything distinctly. He stumbled about, fumbling with the junk that lay everywhere, desperately trying to remember where he had seen the things, dragging away at rope that led nowhere, tripping over boxes. The anchors seemed to have vanished. Perhaps Bream had moved them deliberately into some inaccessible corner.

And all the time the water rose. It was impossible now to go on searching in the forepeak. He had a sudden panic fear he would not be able to find his way back into the cabin, where the roof was higher. But he managed it.

No use now to hope to batter down the door. Water held it on both sides. The launch was sinking; those bloody thugs had opened the sea-cocks or whatever you called them. Had scuttled, anyway. They meant her to go to the bottom with him inside her. They intended to drown him because he now knew too much.

Tim remembered, despairingly, that the cabin-cruiser was on moorings, tied fore and aft away from the shore, so that whenever the gang wanted to go off down the river they could do so, regardless of the tide. So whatever he did he was going to sink with her and this was the end.

Nevertheless he climbed on one of the bunks and as the water rose, crouched with his face turned up to the roof, determined to last as long as he could. When the cabin was full to the top of the door and the pressure equalised he would try to kick the door down before he drowned.

A sudden lurch flung him off balance and under the water. He recovered, only to feel his head strike the roof, still under water. Understanding came in a quick surge of hope. He turned, struck out under water, bumped into the bunk on the opposite side of the cabin, climbed on to it and with bursting lungs emerged into air and stayed there, gasping.

On this side of the cabin the water was barely up to his neck. As he waited, conscious only of the utter stillness in place of swinging motion and of the stale air, growing more stale every minute, the water began to slide away. It was down to his waist, to his knees. It had left him high but not dry on the bunk.

Presently he stretched a leg over the side. The water was less than twelve inches on the cabin sole.

But the air was getting worse all the time. He might not drown now, not on this tide, but he might suffocate.

While he was on the bunk he remembered he had felt something soft against the side of the boat. A curtain, perhaps, over a porthole. He turned to investigate, found what he sought and dragged it away. Dimly, through a coating of river mud he saw lights. He need not have been in such terrifying darkness if he had remembered those small thick curtains earlier.

The porthole had a clasp. It was very stiff, not often opened, evidently, and not improved by its short immersion, but he got it open and stayed beside it for some minutes, drawing in great gulps of air, astonished to find himself still alive.

He now understood fully what had happened. They meant to drown him and lose the launch. Stage an accident, perhaps? Or clear out altogether. They had let the water in, but they had reckoned without the wind. It had blown hard enough to move the cabin cruiser towards the shore. With the tide running out she had taken the ground and tilted over. Fortunately he had been on the bunk nearer the shore, so his weight added to the wind had helped to put her down in this position. Instead of a couple of inches of air above the water on an even keel, inches that would disappear as she sank, she had grounded and tipped and he had found safety.

For a few hours, only. When the tide rose again the launch would not rise, but the water would. Higher than before. He had to get out and fast.

By the light from the open porthole Tim managed to locate a useful piece of hard junk from the forepeak. It was a length of hollow, rounded metal used as an additional lever on the anchor winch. With it he managed to splinter the cabin door and then wrench it apart. He wriggled through the gap he had made, clambered to his feet and promptly fell down again.

The deck of the saloon was covered with a thin film of oily mud. Tim picked himself up and struggled to the companionway and up it into the wheelhouse and on into the open air. The stench below had been unbearable. In any case, though he felt weak and still breathless, he was determined to complete his escape as quickly as possible.

On deck he moved to the bows and looked over. He saw at once that apart from the action of the wind, which still blew with considerable force, another factor had helped to strand the boat.

In order that the warps tying her to the buoys should not hold her up when she was nearly water-logged, but let her sink to the bottom of the river, Winter and Bream had let them off considerably; lengthened them both fore and aft. This accounted for the shouts and bumps he had heard before they left. In plain fact, their action, intended to assist in drowning him, had contributed very largely to preserving his life. They had given the cruiser a freer range of movement and the wind, blowing her strongly broadside on, towards the shore, had done the rest.

Tim's spirits rose considerably as he noted this, in spite of the fact that he was now very cold and shivering violently and saw no immediate prospect of getting off the launch. Though she had gone aground she was not near enough to any of the other vessels for him to jump on to one of them. Nor could he walk over the mud; he would only sink in it or stick there and drown as the tide rose.

He could shout for help. There were no lights on any of the houseboats. He did not even know if they were inhabited. He saw no dinghies among them. Those off-shore were on the mud, like the cabin-cruiser. The ones on the wall leaned against it and one another.

Though it was now well past midnight, he guessed, the usual steady stream of cars was passing over Hammersmith Bridge. They were an encouraging sight, but not helpful.

He looked towards the shore. He could not see any movement on the towpath and he had no means of knowing if the enemy still lurked there, watching. They would, if this was the case, know that the launch had not sunk. They might even have seen him emerge on deck, alive. They might be watching for the next tide to finish him off.

He moved to the river side of the deck and in spite of the wind, stayed there at the rail, prepared to shout if any sort of craft appeared that might take a message for him.

He did not have to wait long. The River Police patrol, passing back from its upper limit, swung a searchlight once more over the boats near the bridge. They saw the cabin-cruiser heeled

over on the mud, they saw Tim waving frantically. Keeping the searchlight upon him the police launch edged inshore, stopping about twenty yards off, her bows up-stream to meet the tide, her engine running to maintain her position.

"Can you take me off?" Tim shouted. "I can't get ashore."

There was a rapid consultation on the patrol boat, then a figure came to the rail and called, "We can't get in any closer. Can you swim?"

"Yes," Tim answered, hoping he was not too weak to do so effectively.

"Then get off by your after warp. There's more water there.

Keep up off the mud. When you reach the buoy I'll throw you a rope, or you can swim off if you like."

"Thanks," Tim called hack.

He moved quickly to the stern, climbed over and wrapping his legs round the chain that led to the buoy, let himself slide slowly down it.

He shuddered as the water closed on him again but managed to hold on. The chain was taut, the cabin-cruiser having moved as far as possible, so Tim's head was above water as far as the buoy. When he reached it, he grasped the ring firmly in one hand and waved with the other.

A thin rope snaked through the air towards him. It fell a yard or two short, but Tim, determined to get out of this freezing element as quickly as possible, plunged away from the buoy, caught the rope, gave it two turns round his waist and tied it, treading water and proceeding rapidly downstream as he did so, the patrol paying out rope until he was secure.

He then set off towards the police launch, the crew, drawing on the rope to help him along. He was soon on board, gasping and limp, but safe.

"You again," said the officer in charge, in a voice of disgust.

Tim looked at the familiar face and grinned feebly.

"Sorry," he said. "I'm afraid it is."

A few minutes later, rubbing down, he asked, "What's the time? I seem to have drowned my watch."

"You said that before," the officer told him.

Chapter Eighteen

Gerry drove into the Staff car park at the West Kensington Hospital and got out of the car. He moved round to the passenger side, opened the door and then told Jane to get out.

She hesitated, but seeing no other course of action, obeyed.

"You know what you have to say," he reminded her. "No tricks, mind, or you've had it."

Jane led him to the Casualty entrance, the only open door in the hospital at that time of night. Looking at the clock on the wall at the entrance, she was astonished to see that it was only just after eleven. As before, when she had been with Gerry, time had seemed to stretch out interminably, but really had been no longer than she would expect.

She nodded to the porter as she went in and he nodded back. Gerry was just behind her. She heard the porter say, "One moment, sir—"

"Mr Stone is with me," Jane said, stopping and speaking over her shoulder. "We're just going to X-ray to look at his film."

Gerry was furious, but he said nothing. They walked on.

"That gag was not in the script," he said, tensely, when they were out of earshot.

"I had to say something. It's true, isn't it? You do want to see your film?"

"I want to see the film you stole."

So that was it. Sheila's film. Hadn't he guessed by now? When his activities had been so largely exposed? When that wretched young man had died?

"I did *not* steal a film. Ever."

"You stole a film belonging to Sheila Burgess."

"I found a film on the floor of her room. I meant to give it back to her. But she left the hospital too soon."

"She was here for several days."

"I tell you I forgot at first. How did I know then that it was important?"

"How d'you know now?"

They had reached the X-ray Department. Jane led the way in,

switching on the lights, her heart sinking as she did so, for she had hoped to find the place occupied with some emergency, a junior staff using the apparatus.

"Give me that film." Gerry said, stopping her as she moved away from the switches.

She was exasperated.

"You know perfectly well I haven't got it!" she cried. "You must know. Otherwise, why—?"

She stopped. His face terrified her. He caught her wrist.

"You killed Sheila Burgess!" he said, glaring down at her. "If you'd given her back the film she'd have been alive now. She was holding out on me at the end, but she'd have given up that film."

"It was not my fault," Jane answered. His accusation touched her never-quenched guilt, but beside his, her fault was negligible.

"You ruined her," she went on, wildly. "You and your drugs and your beastly film and those poor silly clots who think it's smart and that miserable boy who wanted to tell me— *You* destroyed Sheila between you. I asked you on that boat and I ask you again now. When she finally defied you, did you push her into the river? You did, didn't you? You meant her to drown, to look like a suicide. You did, didn't you? *Didn't you*?"

She was on her own ground, she knew there were people awake and working, very near her. She imagined herself safe from direct attack. Already she had heard footsteps passing in the corridor outside the room. One scream would bring help. He wouldn't dare—

She had not yet understood Gerry's twisted mind, its vicious cunning. He let her go on with her accusations until she stopped, out of breath. Then he said, quite mildly, "I see I can't say anything to convince you I had nothing whatever to do with Sheila's death. I wanted her film because I wanted to protect her. Now show me the picture of my wrist and then I'll go home."

Jane thought she had won. She did not believe him, but she thought her determination had put him off any intention he might have had of harming her. She got out the film, which the department held, since his notes had come back from Out-Patients marked 'Did not attend for treatment.'

When he had looked at it and she had explained which of the small bones was the scaphoid and how difficult it was to detect a fracture in it, he nodded, handed back the film and walking away moved down the passage that led to the developing room.

"Come back," Jane cried, following him. "That's not the way out. You can't get out that way."

"And nor can you," Gerry said, snatching her wrist and swinging her in front of him. "Nor will you ever—my dear."

Jane shrank away from him, cursing herself bitterly. How had he known she would follow him? Why hadn't she made a dash for the outer door, into the corridor, away across Out-Patients to Casualty? Now it was too late. She had no doubt at all of his present intention.

He took a knife from his pocket. Seeing her mouth open to scream he smiled a little.

"It won't be heard," he said. "I'm not going to use it on you, anyway. Unless you try anything stupid."

He crouched away from her suddenly. He was fiddling with the power switch in the wall, his back to her. She dared not move. He had the knife. She had nothing.

Presently Gerry crossed behind her to the developing tank. He dropped into it the two long leads he had connected.

"Accidents will happen," he said. "You will be found to have been electrocuted, but as I shall take away these leads, no one will know how you managed to do it."

Jane flung herself towards the power switch but Gerry was too quick for her. He spun her round, caught her hands together and dragged her towards the tank. She saw that he was wearing rubber gloves. Even in her extreme terror, she noticed how they slipped on her skin as she twisted and turned in his grasp. At one moment she had freed herself, but Gerry, tearing off the hampering gloves, caught hold of her again and she knew that the struggle could have only one end.

But at that moment a clear voice called from the receiving room, "Miss Wheelan!"

Gerry froze, one hand flung across Jane's mouth. She saw the glint of the knife in the other.

"Miss Wheelan!" The voice was louder. "Where are you, Miss Wheelan?"

Footsteps sounded quite near.

“Who?” breathed Gerry, taking his hand from her mouth.

“My boss,” she whispered back. “He’s coming in here.”

“Miss Wheelan!” The voice was nearer still. Dr Milton stood at the threshold, peering in. “Didn’t you hear me call? What are you doing in here? Come out at once. I have a job for you to do —”

She obeyed mechanically. As she followed Dr Milton she glanced round. Gerry had disappeared. But she knew where he was. There was only one place where he could hide and that was below the tank just behind where she had been standing.

Outside in the lighted room Dr Milton was blinking, impatient.

“Come along,” he said, raising his voice. “Emergency—Fracture—”

Jane was astonished, bewildered, inclined to laugh hysterically at Dr Milton’s quite ridiculous, unmedical mode of speech. But he had her by the arm. hurrying her across the room and out into the corridor. Garrod, with two other plain-clothes officers, was standing there.

They closed in round the pair.

“Back to the front hall,” Garrod said, briefly, turning away.

Dr Milton, still grasping Jane’s arm, hurried her along. The other men stayed where they were, guarding the two doors into the X-ray Department.

“Now,” said Garrod, when they reached the main entrance. “Now, Miss Wheelan, is Stone in there?”

“Yes,” she answered. “He was just going to kill me.”

She swayed a little, feeling, in the midst of her surging thankfulness, a weakening in all her bones.

“Sit down,” said Dr Milton, helping her to a seat.

“Take your time, Miss Wheelan,” Garrod urged, not wishing her to faint, but anxious to hear her story as quickly as possible.

Jane smiled at him. She related her arrival at the tow-path, the events on the launch, quite uninteresting up to the moment when the river patrol played their searchlight over the boat.

“That put an end to the party,” Jane said. “They couldn’t have faded quicker. Unfortunately just as Tim—”

She stopped. She had given him away, good and proper. Even now he must be waiting for her at the flat, if Mary had let him in.

“I must tell him I’m here,” she said, urgently. “I must ring him up at once!”

“Where d’you expect him to be?” Garrod asked, with a tight look on his face that frightened her. “Was he with you at this party?”

“Not exactly,” she said, miserably. “He came, but I didn’t see him or speak to him until the mad rush to the shore began. Then he was just going to take me across in the boat he was in when Gerry jumped the queue to the one in front. I daren’t refuse to go with him. Besides, you wanted me to—”

“I wanted no more interference from that young man,” Garrod exploded. “Serves him right what he got—”

“I don’t understand,” Jane said, wildly. “He was going back to my flat to wait for me and see Gerry didn’t start anything.”

“But he didn’t do that at all. He thought he’d snoop a bit on the launch. He was lucky to get out of it alive.”

“Oh *no*!”

Jane had not heard the end of Garrod’s complaint. She was on her feet, white-faced and trembling. A small party of men, two of them in the uniform of police car patrols, were moving along the corridor. Jane saw the figure between them, jeans and sweater and bare feet, hair still wet, plastered to his forehead, a dripping bundle in his hand.

She ran forward, her own recent plight quite forgotten. She put her arms round him and held him close.

“Oh, Tim, darling,” she said, half crying, half laughing. “Not *again*!”

Tim hugged her then and stroked her hair, for the tears had won and she was weeping most satisfactorily on his shoulder and all the others looking on, amused and a little touched, until Garrod barked out, “Dr Long, may I have your attention, please!”

“Surely,” said Tim, lifting his head, but not otherwise altering his position. “I’d like yours, too. I have positive proof of Winter’s and Bream’s drug smuggling—”

“That can wait,” Garrod snapped. “If you mean those plastic bottle buoys, our chaps picked one up at the mouth of the Thames, plus a load of dope, a week ago. Now listen to me.”

He explained that Gerry Stone was still in the hospital, that he was armed, probably with a gun as well as the knife with which

he had threatened Jane. He explained what Stone had proposed to do to her, had planned all the time to do to her, and how Dr Milton had organised and carried out her rescue. It had been entirely Dr Milton's idea.

"I happened to be up here finishing an article I'm writing," Dr Milton said, in his usual stiff way. "I needed some papers from my office. I wondered why the department was lit up though nothing was going on there. I went out again to make inquiries. The Superintendent met me and told me the position. They had followed Miss Wheelan here and the porter told them she had gone in with Stone. They were getting anxious."

"So he's in there still," Garrod said. "I've sent for reinforcements. I got men outside the windows as soon as the light went up in the department. He must know it's hopeless. But I gather from Dr Milton he could do a lot of damage if we tried to rush him where he's hiding."

"Why not throw the main switch," Tim suggested, inspired by the electrical details he had heard. "He'll think it's a power cut and that he can get out in the dark and confusion. Give him, say, three minutes, then switch on again and go straight in. I bet he'll be groping about in the department by then. You could rush him in the open, couldn't you?"

Garrod nodded. Actually he had taken the precaution to arm himself and his two chief assistants. He was unwilling to be guided by Tim, who had caused him so much trouble, but the young man's suggestion had a good deal of sense in it and he felt it was worth trying.

The night porter, who was enjoying the whole scene, as he said later, "more than what they gave on the tele," now said, eagerly, "Shall I get Bert on the blower, sir?"

"Electrician," said Tim. "I know him. Shall I go along?"

"O.K.," said Garrod. One of the car patrol went with him.

A few minutes later the whole hospital was plunged in darkness. There were a few exclamations, a few distant cries and shouts, nothing more. Each ward and department had its own drill for power cuts. Tim and the night staff in the electrician's department saw that all the emergency lighting and heating was working satisfactorily. It took less than three minutes to check the various dials and make a few adjustments.

"Now switch on again," Tim said, leaving at a run.

He was too late to hear the high-pitched scream that rang through the X-ray Department a few seconds after the lights came up. But he was there when the two police officers, Garrod and Dr Milton burst into the receiving room.

There was no one there.

Chapter Nineteen

When Jane had left the dark room with Dr Milton, Gerry stayed hidden under the tanks for several minutes, astounded by his ill-luck, furious, half afraid. It was not in his nature to accept failure of any kind, a handicap that had made him suffer more than once before in his life, a moral blindness born in him, ineradicable. Because of it he had not understood at all Jane's fundamental integrity, apart altogether from her trained principles of outlook and behaviour. His commerce with feebler spirits, such as Sheila Burgess, had blunted any power he might ever have had of assessing character. So, crouched in the dim red light of the developing room, he raged profitlessly, cursed at fate, tried to plan revenge. Until, cooling a little, he saw that his prime necessity was escape.

It was at this moment that the red light snapped off, leaving him in total darkness. This was the end. A power cut. The end? Why not a beginning?

He was not so ignorant of hospitals and their ways that he did not know there would be emergency lighting. But surely it would not apply on this occasion to a department out of action? He had not been deceived by Dr Milton's order to Jane. He did not believe in any emergency fracture. Whatever the doctor wanted with the girl, it had nothing to do with medicine. For no sounds of activity in the room beyond had come to him after the two had gone away. He was sure no picture was being taken. Besides, if it had, Jane would have been back in the dark room with a film to develop.

So now Jane would have told her story, described her recent peril. But whatever she had revealed, whatever plan his enemies had cooked up in the endless minutes since he found himself baulked of his prey, the power cut must have upset them, too. While they were re-organising, he must grope his way out of this total blackness into what he supposed would be a partial light from the windows of the receiving room and in the corridors. Staff would he absorbed in finding substitute lighting. He must slip past and through the Casualty door out of the hospital while

the place was still disorganised.

Very slowly, very carefully, he got to his feet and feeling his way with both hands moved along the black passage to the outer room. As he had thought, though the glass of the windows there were frosted, the London night sky shone in dimly. He could see a table, filing cabinets beyond, doors in three of the wails.

With an effort of memory he forced himself to locate the door that led out of the department. Surely it had raced the windows? He began to move towards it and at that moment the light came on again, white, blinding, with the shock of a sudden blow.

Gerry bolted back into the dark room. He was unnerved, shaken, fumbling for the gun in the holster below his armpit.

Facing the passage entrance, gun levelled, he retreated silently until a sharp impact behind his thighs sent him reeling backwards. He thrust out his free hand to fend off what had struck him, felt the edge of the sink slip past his wrist, the wrist weakened in his death fight with young Hill, and as his hand and arm plunged into the water, knew, just before he screamed, that the leads were still resting there, that the fate he had planned for Jane had overtaken himself. The scream, his last indignant protest, was cut off abruptly as final darkness overwhelmed him.

Garrod, with the other officers, the door flung open, looked into the empty receiving room. Dr Milton, from behind the group, said. “That didn’t flush him, after all, did it?”

“He yelled,” said Garrod. “Phoney, d’you think? To get us in there?”

He pointed with his own weapon at the entrance of the darkroom passage.

“I wouldn’t have said it was phoney, by the sound of it,” Dr Milton said. “From what Miss Wheelan told us I’d suppose his electrical arrangements went wrong in some way.”

Garrod gave the radiologist a startled look. But the latter had left the room and almost immediately came back, pulling on rubber gloves. He strode over to the dark room entrance.

“No, sir,” Garrod said, moving quickly in front of him. “We’ll deal with this.”

“Don’t touch anything, then,” Dr Milton said. “Whatever you find. I’ll come in behind you.”

They found Gerry slumped across the sink, one arm and

shoulder deep in the water, his head twisted against the wall behind, his legs buckled under him, his body held by a stool he had pushed out when he emerged from under the tank.

"Don't touch him," Dr Milton warned again as Garrod sprang forward. The latter checked. He had taken in the situation at once and now saw the leads trailing over the edge of the sink.

Motioning the others to keep back, he followed the flexes to the wall. But Dr Milton was before him. He had moved at once to the switch, thrown it, pulled out the leads, and leaving them on the floor, went to the sink. He took hold of Gerry's shoulders with his gloved hands and lifting the limp body away laid him down on the floor, where he made a brief examination.

"Dead," he said, looking up at Garrod. "Do you chaps want him or shall I arrange for the post-mortem here, since he died in this hospital?"

His cold efficiency both shocked and restored the police officers. Garrod met it with his own shrewd energy.

"Perhaps you would discuss that with the coroner's officer, sir," he said. "Here or your local public mortuary, as he directs. I'll leave Sergeant Phillips with you to see to the arrangements and take statements. I have a lot to attend to now, as you will appreciate."

"Like hell I do," said Dr Milton, with surprising warmth. "I hope you get the lot of them."

"With any luck we may," Garrod said.

The round-up had already begun. From the moment the river patrol had recognised Jane on the cabin cruiser's deck, the word, radioed back to Scotland Yard, had gone out to car patrols, district headquarters, ports and airports. The small-fry were pulled in for questioning. Mrs Coates, the Camden Town café staff, the friends of the dead youth, Hill, and others.

Tom and Toni were picked up in their car in Huntingdon, heading north. Ronald Bream and his wife were stopped at London Airport.

But Giles Winter had disappeared. It was nearly a year later before he was recognised in Cairo. Extradition was refused, but as Garrod told Dr Milton, who passed it on, word for word, to Jane and Tim, "We didn't mind much. He was only a rather nasty cog in a big wheel. Stone wasn't the head of the organisation; the real brass are abroad. Winter ran to them for

help, but he didn't get any. He'd be much better off, more comfortable, in the nick here in England than living the way he is, there, now. Fifth-rate night club, half-starved by the look of him, or ill, more likely, poor devil."

"I'm not in the very least bit sorry for him," Jane said, repeating Dr Milton's words. "Devil, if you like, but poor devil, no. He deserves all he gets. I hope it kills him."

"Vindictive, aren't you?" Tim said, fondly.

"With good cause. I shall never forget Sheila. She didn't have a chance with that crowd. Not the ghost of a chance."

"You'll forget all this when we're married," he told her. "At least I hope so. I don't want a wife that broods on disasters."

"And I don't want a husband who's continually falling fully clothed into the Thames," Jane answered.

"You won't have. I'm going to find a job in the provinces far from this urban cesspit. A place where my patients present nice, straightforward surgical problems with no sinister, twisted dramas in the background."

"Just looking at the Burgess family you wouldn't have guessed they'd have a sinister, twisted, dramatic background, would you?"

"You would not."

"It makes you think doesn't it? I mean, how many dull homes have—"

"That's enough," Tim said, kissing her. "Let's go and find dinner at our little restaurant. No social problems there. Just damned good food, and I like food."

"Bless you, darling, so do I," Jane told him.

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